

# Cheerleaders work at their sport

By WENDY STRINGFELLOW  
Staff Writer

Collegiate cheerleading has progressed from a sidelight to a sport, with its own competitions and coaches, and North Carolina is no exception to the trend toward athleticism in cheering.

Scot Wilce, who coached gymnastics for 10 years, now trains the varsity and junior varsity squads. "I'm reorganizing and training them more like athletes," Wilce said. "That's what cheerleading is becoming more and more."

In the past, cheerleaders have often been looked at as decoration and not given much respect for their actual talents. "We're getting that respect now," said co-captain Quentin Alexander. "People are coming to our practices and realizing we're not just a bunch of people jumping

up down and screaming."

So they're athletes. What can we expect to see this year besides short skirts and firm muscles?

"You'll see a better version of what you saw last year — very sharp motions, excellent dances and more tumbling," Wilce said. Also the squad is working more on precision rather than difficulty of their routines.

But don't expect to see too many pyramids. Pyramids aren't safe, and they don't really motivate the crowd, Wilce said.

According to Alexander, the girls are putting more emphasis on sharp, flashy dances. Also, the cheers will be "simple, so that the crowd can yell with us more."

One cheer the crowd should like is called "We Got Spirits," said Alexander.

"It has movements the crowd can do. Of course, they can use their flasks and yell. 'We got spirits.'"

The cheerleaders have a rigorous practice schedule. Twice a week they practice for three hours. At these practices they begin by tumbling, then they do cheers and routines and they finish with strength exercises.

Two other days each week, the guys lift weights while the girls do strengthening exercises or practice dances. These days practice lasts about an hour. In addition to this,

each male/female partner team practices its stunts twice a week for one to two hours.

"Strength training is progressive," said Wilce. "The girls need torso strength, the stomach, hips, legs, (but more importantly) they need to have body control."

"Any strength (for girls) is motion-specific," Wilce said. They need to train their arms to move quickly. Lifting weights wouldn't do that for them, he said. "If you lift weights slowly, you won't be able to pull (your arm) up fast when you need to."

"The guys are really strong," Wilce said. "Throwing girls who weigh 110-120 pounds and holding them for extended periods of time requires a lot of strength."

A person needs to be able to lift more than that in order to be in control, he added. "Number one, it's not safe; number two, it doesn't look good. There's a motto among the guys, 'a girl never hits the ground no matter what.'"

With a coach on the scene now, the squad has to keep pushing even when it may not feel like it.

"We had someone who hurt her wrist," said Emily Blount, the other co-captain. "We were doing push-ups, and he said to just ball up your fist and do them that way."

In the past, cheerleaders were

# Sports



DTH/Dan Charlson

The members of the 1986 UNC varsity cheerleading team believe cheerleading can be called a sport

viewed as pretty girls who wanted popularity. To these 16 men and women, that stereotype is as out-of-date as June Cleaver.

Today's cheerleader needs strength, endurance and agility. "The football players get to sit down during the game," Alexander said. "If the band plays, we have to have kept going no matter how tired we are."

While cheerleaders declare their athletic prowess, some wonder just what the cheerleader's role is.

"I don't think they serve a purpose

in a college this big," said Bob Smith III, a senior journalism student. "The crowds are too large."

Yet, Wilce maintained cheerleaders play an important role in motivating the crowd.

"Just compare how well a team does when it's at home with when it's away," he said. "Trying to get a crowd going that's not real happy is tough to do, but that's what I expect from them. On the floor, they're to motivate the crowd."

This summer, competing against 60 other colleges, UNC finished in

the top five. "We're not really sure where we finished because they only gave out a first place and first runner-up," Alexander said.

In 1978 UNC won the televised National Collegiate Cheerleading Championships held in the spring.

"It's become a lot more competitive now," Alexander said. "A lot of squads are doing three-high pyramids (three people standing, stacked on each other's shoulders) and flipping over the top. We're limited."

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