

# P.R. AWARENESS TRAINING

Although your cheerleaders are unlikely to be called upon to give a speech at a big charity function, they are nevertheless P.R. representatives of your organisation and the sport. They should be aware of how to respond to the Press and create the right image to the Media.

As cheerleading moves into higher profile and public awareness increases the opportunities to generate positive publicity and coverage becomes more frequent, and PR dangers greater.

Do not lay yourself open to minefield situations, like ignoring safety, being uninsured, or behaving inappropriately. Your conduct and reputation reflects that of your community and the sport.

Seize the moment if a photo opportunity arises and have a compact spirited group pose worked out. Wasting five minutes arranging everybody and the photographer may not hang around. 1/250th of a second stands between you and the Weekend Edition so get used to all smiling together. Choreograph photo poses at training, then you can call it as quick as a timeout. Ensure that everyone can see the camera and the camera will see you.

Photo opportunities help publicise the squad, and of course the reporter will ask questions about those photographed for the feature. Mostly it will just be names and home towns for the 'local angle', however they will often ask questions to add colour and interest. This where some basic P.R. training is a must.

Make sure everyone is well grounded in the background of their squad and the basic history of the sport. Facts and figures:- Make sure you have concise relevant data mentally to hand. How long has your team been running? How many other clubs are there? When did the sport start? If you are lucky enough to have a sponsor then find a way of naming them early on in your answers.

Make your answers short and direct. Do not waffle. You need to convince the Reporter that this is a fascinating topic that will be of interest to their readers, and thus worthy of a published feature. You need to fulfil the precepts of "what makes this special?" and "why should our readers care?". With natural cheerleader enthusiasm this should not be hard to justify!

Create a basic fact sheet about your squad and the sport and have everyone learn it. Stage a mock

Press Conference at training. Squad members can interview each other, with subtle hints from Coach, to see what reactions you get to standard questions. It can be most enlightening.

Here is an example to show that being prepared is far preferable to being caught off guard by questions members may not be used to being asked, or maybe not even thought about.

Q: What made you take up Cheerleading?

Good Answers: Fun, fitness, worthwhile, community involvement, an athletic sport, leadership, helping others. Image breakers: Meeting boys, nice uniform, bit of a lark.

Be prepared for controversial topics and hostile reporters, the legacy of years of TV sit-coms. They may be disappointed to hear there are no scandals, that cheerleaders do not date Players, and no fights over nail varnish. Cheerleader uniform has skirts no shorter than any other sport. Do not be defensive, just factual. Be extremely careful not to be lead into saying anything which could be deliberately misquoted out of context.

Anyone writing a feature will have already researched the subject, and be coming with a story line they have cleared with base. If they are looking for smut and can't find it, they are liable to give you a bad write up anyway. Objectivity and professionalism should never be assumed.

Television opportunities can be enhanced if you can very quickly put together a simple chant including the name of the Presenter and the Show. Pick a few well known standard chants and practice adapting them to suit any occasion.

Creating a good impression with the Press can make a big difference to your chances of coverage, plus the possibilities of sponsorship that media exposure can provide. Experienced Squad's are used to it and naturally slip into gear. Any aspect of Cheerleading activity that requires a little forethought and organisation to do effectively is well worth practising.

**Be aware that the sport is under the spotlight due to its massive growth and increasing profile. If someone gets hurt doing something dangerous or brings the sport into disrepute the opportunity will be seized upon.**

