

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PROGRESSIONS

**As with any other athletic discipline skills have to be taught in a progressional manner so that each level can be fully mastered before progressing onto the next stage. Leading cheerleaders into trying advanced techniques that may be beyond their present safe ability level is irresponsible and likely to lead to avoidable injury.**

Cheerleading technique is inherently safe provided the skills are taught starting with the basics, in a properly safe environment, by coaches who themselves have received adequate training and qualifications. Just as with learning to drive you would not get a new student to head for the nearest motorway, or go faster than they can presently control with confidence. There is a lot to learn and take in before certain things become instinctive and automatic as the body builds 'memory' over time and with constant repetition.

Constant drilling in basics are essential to build correct body memory. Too often basics are taught well, but become 'rounded off' or 'short cut' over time unless regularly drilled and corrected. The same principle exists for martial arts and gymnastics. Precision of correct execution makes for solid safe stunts, at all levels.

New cheerleaders are first taught arm motions. It is surprising how many potential points are lost in competitions through not having everyone in precise and correct unison. Arm angles, wrist positions, and fingers.

With stunts start with thigh stands, 'L' stands and pony sits. Techniques that can be learned without the flyer getting their feet much more than two feet off the floor. The same elements of Step; Lock; Tighten; apply to most stunts so learning at this level creates confidence and security. More experienced squads should remember that in creating routines with a variety of visual height levels solid thigh stands at the front accentuate elevators behind and full extensions at the back. All have to be executed well.



This is the point where you begin training the most important members of your stunt teams, your Spotters. Spotters are the people who cover performers off

the ground, ensuring their safety and making sure that dismounts are controlled. The spotters job is to S.P.O.T., Save Person On Top. Spotting dismount drills should be a regular part on your practice sessions. Stunts come down, and not always in the manner you are expecting. Spotters are constantly alert, making sure that no one ever hits the ground.

When basic level stunts are mastered and spotters are able to cover 100% effectively every time then you can move up to prep height stunts (see right). Again you must drill them until it is 100% solid and secure, with good technique, and spotters efficiently covering every eventuality with confidence.



Only after this should you move up to full extensions, or beyond. Beware of overconfidence creeping in, and clamp down on any lack of attention by Spotters.



Safety limits are defined by experts, taking into account the potential of certain techniques resulting in injury if it goes badly wrong. Techniques are deemed illegal on this basis, and not that they are some "higher level" as some suggest. Potentially dangerous stunts are often just as easy to do, so it is not clever to disregard safety. Unsupported inversions have high risk of someone landing on their neck. Stunts which have shown spotting unplanned collapses often fail are also banned with good reason. It has little to do with degree of difficulty, just well documented degree of risk.