



ALL STAR CHEERLEADING

Juggling Act

Does cheering on a school squad + all-star team = the total cheer package? Find out what it's really like to pull double duty!

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Spend a week in the sneaks of a typical cheerleader and you're likely to reach the following conclusion: "hectic" is an understatement! Games, practices, pep rallies and tumbling classes are all in a day's work. Multiply that regimen times two and it's almost hard to fathom.

Welcome to the world of cheering for your school and moonlighting on an all-star team. While these girls aren't exactly leading 007-style double lives, the demands of cheer duties times two are often just as rigorous—and as glamorous. Cheering on an all-star team gives instant competition cred, while cheering for middle or high school or college squads offers an unrivaled spirit and performance experience. But it takes a whole lot of talent and time management savvy to pull it off.

Join AC as we take a look at the pros and cons of having a full cheer plate and talk to some sistas who are doin' it for themselves.

Hey Now, You're an All-Star

So what's the draw of cheering on two squads at once? Dana Luker, a cheerleader for the Stingray Allstars and Walton High School in Kennesaw, GA, wouldn't have it any other way. "I love cheering. I couldn't imagine doing only one or the other," says the perky senior. "I love to pump up the crowd at football games, but I also love the rush of competing for all-stars."

Most cheerleaders in this situation say that each type of team offers different benefits. High school junior Jess Shinn says she loves the stunting experience she gets from cheering for the Ohio-based All-Star Lakers, since her squad at Celina High School is ground bound. But because Jess thrives on the atmosphere of cheering at football games, she insists she could never give up cheering for school.

Jess is not alone. Her entire squad is on both the Lakers all-star team and the Celina HS team, which means their coaches have to put their heads together to make sure practice schedules don't overlap. They're also able to use their flashy all-star tumbling passes in their routines at games, which Jess says is a blast. "Anywhere we go, people are amazed at our tumbling ability because we have gotten so much experience through all-stars," says Jess.

Unlike Jess, most of Dana's teammates at school are not on her all-star squad, which can make for some creative scheduling requests. Only four of her 16 teammates cheer with her on the Stingrays, so practices must be staggered to avoid conflict. On Wednesdays and Sundays, Dana practices with the Stingrays. Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays are reserved for WHS practices. And Fridays? It's all about pep rallies and cheering at the high school games.

That's not including the once-a-week tumbling class that Dana is required to take by her Stingray coach. If Dana or any of her fellow all-stars miss the tumbling class, they must do 10 triple-toe backs at their Sunday practice for each person that skipped out. Does she ever go into cheer overload? "It's a little stressful, but I love doing it," says Dana, who has been cheering for eight years. "You get to know all the girls on both teams so



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well, because you're with them all the time. You go through all of the emotions with them: happiness, sadness, defeat, victory."

Avoiding Burnout

As with any busy sports schedule, athletes cheering on two squads simultaneously have to be super vigilant in taking care of themselves. Katie Belcher, a freshman cheerleader at the University of Central Oklahoma, learned that the hard way. While cheering her sophomore year of high school for teams at Claremore High School and the Cheer Dynamix gym, Katie tore her Achilles tendon and had to undergo surgery.

"It was just too much for my body," says Katie, who has been cheering since eighth grade. Katie loved cheerleading too much to give it up entirely, so the following year at school, she opted to cheer only for Cheer Dynamix in order to lessen the pressure on her tender tendon.

If you're currently leading a similar schedule, it's important to take care of yourself so that your body can keep up. Remember to get at least eight hours of sleep per night so you can properly recharge. It's also important to refuel with snacks and water throughout the day. Your body will thank you!

Another thing to keep in mind if you're considering cheering for two squads: How sharp are your time management skills? Between the two squads, you'll likely be practicing as many as six days a week, which means you'll have precious little time left for homework and socialization. But it is possible! Dana makes sure to get all of her projects done and see her friends on Saturdays (her day off), while Jess takes advantage of study halls and down time to make sure her work is done.

The Payoff

So much cheerleading is rarely a bad thing! Members of two squads get double the experience, double the skills, double the friendships and double the exposure. Jess and Dana also hope that their double duty will land them on college teams.

"I'm so used to having to manage my time with [cheering for] high school and all-stars that I think I'd be able to take the pressure of having to put so much time into [college cheerleading]," says Jess, who is hoping to land a spot on the team at Ohio State University.

Dana says that she wants her college cheer experience to mirror that of her high school squad rather than all-stars. "The college cheerleading I'm looking to do is about football games and leading the crowd," says Dana, who is gunning for University of Georgia. "I don't know if I want to compete in college, just because it is so time-consuming and I want to have a social life in college. But I am grateful for my all-star experience because [there] I learned everything I know about gymnastics and stunting."

Though it can be overwhelming at times, there is little doubt that leading a 007 life might be just the ticket to the ultimate cheer lifestyle.