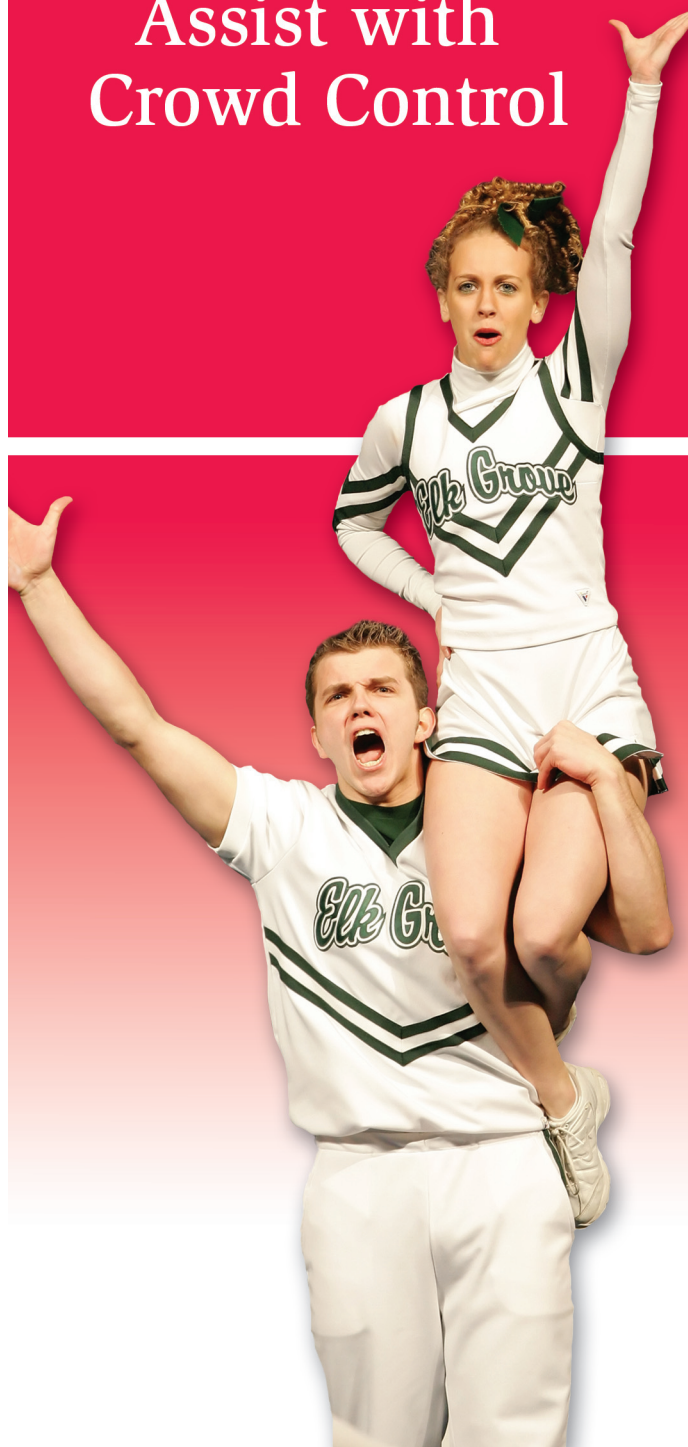




# CHEERLEADERS

## Assist with Crowd Control



By Jennifer Uselton

1

### Cheerleaders are the **Link** between the fans and the action on the field.

Cheerleaders should consider themselves the link between the game action and the fans. This is the key concept. Cheerleaders should utilize that link to positively influence the fan energy. There should be an open communication between the cheerleaders and fans.

When cheerleaders have a clear understanding of the game, they will perform material that is appropriate for the game environment. Being aware of defensive and offensive plays, along with specific game rules, will help cheerleaders effectively lead the crowd. Traditional material with easy-to-follow directions will entice the crowd to join it.

Participation in cheer refrains gives the crowd the opportunity to be a part of the game. That is why it is so important to make the sideline material so easy to follow. If the crowd is following the directions of the cheerleaders, fans are less likely to participate in unsportsmanlike conduct.

2

### Prevention and Reaction (planned contingency prevention)

Two major facets to the phenomena: Prevention and Reactionary Maintenance (the before and during – after is too late!)

**Prevention** consists of having a solid understanding of the game atmosphere before the crowd is assembled. For example, two teams with a long-standing rival, or even a play-off game with high tension and anxiety, are atmospheres for potential disruptive or unsportsmanlike behavior. Identifying teams that have a reputation for aggressive or unsportsmanlike fans before you interact is also a good way to prepare for some of the potential unwanted actions that could occur.

**Reactionary maintenance** is when a cheerleading team begins crowd participation material to stifle or calm unsportsmanlike behavior that may erupt in the stands. Many schools have opted to put extra athletes on the cheer team so that the cheerleaders can venture up into the stands and have a physical presence that will help to manage crowd behavior.

3

### Directions need to be palatable to the fans

Help the fans understand what is expected from them first! It needs to be a conscious effort on the members of the crowd to understand the limits of acceptable vs. unacceptable behavior in the game environment. Often, it seems that once a mob mentality forms, and disruptive behavior seems acceptable within the crowd, it has the potential to increase to levels of physical nature.

## 4

**Communication between the cheer team and crowd need to be positive and prominent!**

To do this, the fans need to understand how important their role can be, and be made to feel that they are an integral part of the event. It is easy to identify the “crowd instigators.” Singling these people out ahead of time and inviting them to be your “liaisons” to the crowd can create the positive communication that the school is looking for.

- Organizing a student group can be helpful! (“Blue Crew” – “Dog Pound” – “Hawk’s Nest” etc.)
- Remember to set a good example to fans. Promote crowd yelling with the squad and team coming over and high-fiving with cheerleaders when appropriate. This shows both sides that they have a common way to control and produce the environment that the event deserves.

## 5

**Sportsmanlike behavior needs to be taught by example**

The crowd needs to be taught how to be good fans. What is appropriate behavior? What can be potentially “fun” for them to do? There are appropriate ways to show both excitement and disappointment. Many fans want to feel like they have had an effect on the game. They will try, for example, to yell and wave their arms during a “free throw.” This is acceptable. Yelling inappropriate, or degrading slurs, or threatening physical abuse is not acceptable.

Let the crowd know that it can get the opponent “off its game” without acting unsportsmanlike. Using actual cheerleaders or a coach to be the teachers can be helpful. Having athletes from other sports be the ambassadors can also help.

## 6

**The energy needs to be directed for the fans**

Cheerleaders need to be THE leaders! They need to keep flow during game situations and be ahead of the crowd. They can be channeling the energy of the crowd in a productive manner. There are scripted moments and impromptu moments. Utilizing the proper kind of material and organizing participation in between plays can also lessen the amount of time available for unsportsmanlike conduct. The better the cheerleaders can effectively lead the crowd, the better examples they become. This type of behavior should diffuse throughout the crowd.

## 7

**Material and actions need to be sport-specific**

For football, use chants during their plays and for scores. In basketball, be ready for quick turnovers and fast action play. Basketball is all about flow of the game. There are more opportunities for bad calls to be made. Your cheerleaders HAVE to be ready to stave it off, but maintaining good flow can help this. The band and music always help as well, but are not always available. Make sure the squad is ready to change from a defense to an offense

chant in coordination with the plays of the game. Be aware of the energy and utilize this energy to help stem an opponent’s rally or sustain one of your own.

With all these sports, and with consideration to student organizations, there is a HUGE chance for interplay. Having athletes help teach cheerleaders the what, how and when of the game and the things the team appreciates or needs most from the cheerleaders and the crowd, will help. It is also important to set consequences for unsportsmanlike actions early in the season. Letting the fans know what the student body should be doing is also a good reminder for athletes with regard to what kind of sportsmanlike conduct the fans expect from the players.

**ANTICIPATE! ANTICIPATE! ANTICIPATE!**

## 8

**Reaction**

As far as the reactionary side of it, recognition is important. Often enough, bad behavior is pretty easy to spot. As a cheerleader, you cannot give this bad behavior any credence or attention at ALL. Obviously, making an attempt to ignore it can sometimes be provocative attention in itself. Shouting with your crowd while introducing appropriate material can be effective. Shouting over an opponent’s team or crowd can give you a golden opportunity to lead your own crowd away from an unsavory response to the play. Always portray a confident leader.

Negative stimuli in response to crowd behavior can be possible, but is not acceptable coming from the cheerleaders. Teachers, coaches and figures of authority are better at this and can give helpful tips to the squad on how to master the art of tact.

If the coaches of your teams, or the school administrators frown upon bad behavior in a respectful way, instead of a confrontational way, fans will pick up on that. Athletes from other sports can be an ambassador for help. Just letting your fans know, sometimes on an individual basis, “Hey, you are embarrassing yourself and our school when you do that,” can help. **CQ**

*Cheerleading photo provided by Illinois High School Association.*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Jennifer Uselton was a top instructor for UCA for more than 15 years. She has coached and trained thousands of cheerleaders across the world. Uselton is also a judge for regional, state and national competitions. She has worked closely with many state associations in training their state level judges.

Uselton is also a seasoned veteran choreographer and leadership development specialist. She has been a speaker at cheerleading conferences at the state, national and international levels, and she also works on developing coaching seminars and training other speakers.

Uselton is currently the coaches education coordinator for the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA).

