



How to Choose a Cheerleading & Dance Gym

It wasn't all that long ago that I was in your position ~ the parent of a child who wanted to join a cheerleading gym but having *No Idea* on how to get started or pick the Right One! I wish I knew then what I know now!! :) But you are lucky ~ you are reading this article. Here, in a nutshell, is everything I learned about how to evaluate Cheerleading & Dance gyms. My daughter and I learned it over the past five years of cheering and dancing ~ but I hope this speeds you along the learning curve considerably faster than that! :)

Quality of Performances & Competition Results

As is true with all competitive sports, the idea of participation in competitive Cheer & Dance is for your child to develop the personal skills, self-discipline, and team cooperation necessary to achieve an overreaching goal ~ to win competitions.

When you are evaluating and comparing gyms, start with the "Awards" section of their web site or publications. The gyms you are evaluating should have their competition results prominently displayed in some fashion. Let's get down to the brass tacks ~ the gym with the highest quality staff, training, routines, and athleticism will consistently win competitions. That is not to say that every team will win first place every time, but overall, they should display a consistent pattern of taking home the top awards.

Be discriminating ~ look more closely than simply tallying the number of 1st place trophies they have earned. Closely evaluate the quality of the competitions the gym attends. National Competitions are generally much more rigorous and competitive than are Regional Competitions. If a gym claims a stellar winning record yet they consistently attends only Regional Competitions, they are not competing at the highest level of competition, and a large number of 1st place awards are not as strong an indication of quality as awards earned by gyms that attend, and win, National Competitions.

Look for more awards than just 1st place trophies. Has the gym been recognized for quality in choreography, stunting, sportsmanship, and best overall program? These awards are given at some competitions to the gym that performed so well that they were recognized by the judges as being of a higher quality than their competitors.

Watch out for the marketing! Look for significant time gaps between competitions in the Awards listing, and watch for gaps in team listings. Is every competition the gym attended listed, and is every team in the gym listed for every competition? Be careful that they have not listed only the competitions in which they competed well and omitted the teams that did not do well. Generally, gyms attend their first competition of the season in late October or early November and compete at least one a month until mid-to-late March. An awards listing that has long gaps between competitions, or in which all teams are not listed should be questioned.

How We Perform & Compete

Our gym, Cheer Legendz, consistently outperforms all other Cheer and Dance gyms in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. For a listing of Legendz' Awards, click [here](#) or go to the web site at <http://www.CheerLegendz.net> and click on the "Awards" hyperlink. For example, at the Athletic National Championship in St. Louis in November, 2008 nearly every St. Louis area Cheerleading gym competed. Seven of our nine squads took home a 1st place trophy and three squads took home a Grand Championship trophy. At the American Spirit Competition in St. Louis in January, 2009, every Cheer Legendz Squad earned 1st place, 6 of our teams earned Grand Championships, and the gym was awarded the Best Program award.



Market Leadership

As is true in every market, there are competitors ~ and the customers will sort the choices by voting with their memberships. One way to evaluate the quality of a gym is to look at their position within the market ~ are they one of many providers of similar size, or are they a significantly larger or smaller gym? If one gym is significantly larger, or has an overall prevailing presence, there are probably very good reasons why. In a very competitive market ~ and Cheerleading and Dance *is a very competitive market* ~ when customers with experience in the market consistently and overwhelmingly choose one gym over the others ~ a significant part of your homework has been done for you!

One caveat: when you are evaluating the market presence and size of a gym, be certain that you evaluate the number of *individual* athletes who are enrolled in its separate programs. It is a practice among some gyms to “double team” athletes ~ a practice in which individual athletes are placed on more than one team of the same type in order to make the gym appear larger. Through this practice, a gym inflates the number of teams it presents at a competition and, if this practice is invoked often, can make the gym appear to be 2-3 times larger than its actual size.

Our Market Position

Cheer Legendz is by far the Market Leader in Cheerleading and Dance in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. We consistently enroll approximately 250 individual athletes each season ~ over double of that of our nearest competitors, making us the largest Cheerleading gym in the Midwest and one of the largest Cheerleading gyms in the United States. Cheer Legendz does not double team our athletes within a program to inflate the number of teams we present at competitions.

Team Compatibility

The most common feedback I hear from other parents is that their athletes thrive the most when they are placed on squads that match them closely in age and skill. Small gyms have no choice but to form teams that are made up of athletes who vary, sometimes widely, in age and skill. When you are evaluating potential gyms, take a close look at the age and skill diversity of the squads. Will your young athlete be placed on a squad with mature teenagers or visa versa? Will your beginner tumbler be on a squad where she/he is continually frustrated and struggling to keep up with more experienced tumblers?

Our Squad Placements

At Cheer Legendz, our larger number of athletes allows the coaches to form teams comprised of athletes of compatible ages and skills. Athletes find that they compete at a skill level that is comfortable for their current development ~ while allowing them to strive for their personal best.

Quality of Staff

The quality of every sports program springs directly from the quality of its staff. Therefore, reviewing of the quality of the gym's staff is an essential step. Each gym's web site should have a page that lists their staff members, complete with a short bio for each one. Take a little time to evaluate several factors. First, look at the expertise and experience of the leadership of the gym as it relates to the service you are considering. Does the owner/manager of the gym have experience in Cheerleading and Dance? Are they recognized by their peers as being experts in Cheerleading & Dance? Are they safety certified in Cheerleading?



Does that staff have the experience they need to manage and lead squads? Does the overall staff have stability?

Ask these questions: Are all the practices managed by an adult coach with extensive experience in the area she/he is coaching? Is the program developed and managed by Coaches who are safety certified by their professional association, the United States All Star Federation (USASF)? Be leary of young, inexperienced coaches or athletes managing teams on their own, or of gyms who use parent helpers.

Our Staff

Cheer Legendz has established itself as the overwhelming Market Leader for one simple reason ~ the quality of our staff. Of our current ten-member staff, six are original members and a seventh has been with us since our second year. Our Head Coaches are Level 5 Safety Certified USASF (the highest level possible). For complete bios of our staff click [here](#) or go to our web site at <http://www.CheerLegendz.net> and click on the "Staff" hyperlink. If you are short on time (aren't we all!), here is a brief summary of our primary staff:

- Anthony Best, Head Cheerleading Coach, Chief Cheerleading Choreographer
 - Co-Owner and Creator of Cheer Legendz
 - Greater than 10 years of Coaching Experience
 - Award Winning Choreographer
 - Head Coach of Pumaz, which earned 3 consecutive bids to Worlds
 - Co-Coach of Lindenwood University Cheer Squad, 2nd in Nation
 - Choreographer of University of Missouri Cheer Squad, 4th in Nation
 - Competition Judge
 - Former University of Missouri ~ Columbia Cheerleader Squad Captain
- Fernando Brown, Head Hip Hop Coach, Chief Dance Choreographer
 - Named one of the Best Coaches in US in 2006 by *American Cheerleader*
 - Greater than 10 years of Coaching Experience
 - Award Winning Choreographer
 - Choreographer & Coach of Saberz, which earned 2009 bid to Dance Worlds
 - Co-Coach of Pumaz, which earned 2008 and 2009 bids to Worlds
 - Competition Judge
- Melissa Dillon, Cheer Coach, Tumbling Coach
 - Greater than 10 years of Coaching Experience
 - Former Lindenwood University Cheerleader that placed 3rd in US
 - Earned more than 200 Tumbling & Gymnastic Gold Medals
 - Named top 10 Power Tumblers in the US for two years
- Ricky Hunt, Cheer Coach, Tumbling Coach
 - 10 years of Coaching Experience
 - Co-Coach of Lindenwood University Cheer Squad
 - Former University of Missouri ~ Columbia Cheerleader Squad Captain
 - Acro Gymnastics Champion in Stunting
- Tony Palmansano, Cheer Coach, Tumbling Coach, Stunting Coach
 - Five years of Coaching Experience
 - Earned Multiple Gold Medals in Stunting, Tumbling and Acro Gymnastics over a five year period



Concentration of Focus

I have learned that in the Cheerleading and Dance world, there are two basic types of gyms. One type is a gym that provides competitive Cheerleading & Dance instruction as their primary business. The second type provides Cheerleading & Dance as a secondary business ~ as a sideline to another, more central business that is usually gymnastics, although it may be another sport.

One factor to consider when choosing a Cheerleading gym is this: Is the service you are buying a core competency of the owner & staff? Or, is it a sideline business in which their competency is less well developed or currently under development? In short, are they experts in the field of Cheerleading & Dance? Do they really understand the profession with all of its nuances, or are they simply trying to add a service to expand their central business?

Take some time to consider whether or not a business that is highly diversified can devote the time, energy and resources it needs to establish and maintain expertise in Cheerleading and Dance. Is it possible that many diversifications will result in a splintering of focus, making the program less effective?

Our Position

At Cheer Legendz, Competitive Cheer and Hip Hop Dance is all we do. Our owners and staff are experts in their fields, and they live and breathe their profession. In fact, we *obsess* about it. Nationally Competitive Cheerleading and Hip Hop Dance is not a sideline to another business. We focus wholly on our areas of expertise.

Open Evaluations

We invite you to come by. Visit our lobby and watch our practices. Meet our owners & watch our coaches at work. Meet our parents. Enroll in a class. Join us at a competition. Come to our try-outs in April. We would love to meet you and introduce you to all that we do. We accept new athletes to our competitive squads from April to August each season and enroll athletes in our classes continuously throughout the year (until they fill). We do not require contracts and joining fees are not required. For our competitive squad program, a Team Handbook is provided to you when you try out that outlines our program requirements and provides the fees up front. We are always happy to answer questions.



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