



NEWS RELEASE

Risk Minimization Focus of 2025-26 High School Spirit Rules Changes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: James Weaver

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 6, 2025) — Six changes in the cheer section regarding risk minimization were among the revisions recommended by the NFHS Spirit Rules Committee at its February 9-11 meeting in Orlando, Florida. All recommended changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors and take effect with the 2025-26 high school spirit season.

“The committee continues to look at the risk minimization for all participants in cheer and dance activities,” said James Weaver, NFHS director of performing arts and sports and liaison to the NFHS Spirit Rules Committee. “These changes continue our ongoing progression to making this activity safer for every participant who is in cheer or dance.”

The committee also approved a major reorganization to the NFHS Spirit Rules Book. The definitions that comprised Rule 1 have been moved into respective rules for cheer and dance. Going forward, Rule 1 is General Risk Minimization, Rule 2 is Cheer and Rule 3 is Dance. All rules references have been adjusted accordingly.

In Rule 2-2-7, an additional exception was approved to the requirement of a spotter for extended stunts or transitions that stop in an extended position. Now, a single-base stunt in which the top person is vertical and supported at the waist is permitted.

In Rule 2-3-5d, the requirement that the top person is not inverted was deleted since the top person is rotating and would be descending. In addition, the flip can now end on the performing surface as well as in a cradle.

Safety was again the focus with a new rule in Rule 2-3-9, which states that “the top person in a partner stunt, pyramid or transition may not leave the floor unassisted with the intent to land or be caught in an inverted body position.” The rules committee noted that this rule change clarifies that a performer may not perform a skill such as a back handspring with no hands and be caught by a base or bases in the inverted position.

A revision was approved in Rule 2-5-3-e to clarify that someone involved in a toss to a cradle should not have any involvement with props.

In another change to emphasize that basket tosses are illegal, a new sub-article was added to Rule 2-5-3 stating that tosses to a cradle are permitted provided “the top person does not execute hip-over-head rotation while released from all tossers/catchers and spotters.

The final revision in the cheer section was Rule 2-5-6e, which states that “when starting from a vertical position at prep level, the top person may land in a position where the upper body is vertical or horizontal. The release must not go significantly higher than the point of contact with the bases on the catch.” The committee noted that stunts like a flatback are allowed if the top does not go significantly higher than the bases’ arms/hands on the catch. The tosses that are allowed go through the prep position to release.

The committee added definitions and approved a number of editorial changes to the Dance section, now Rule 3 in the NFHS Spirit Rules Book. As an example, throughout the Dance section, the term “base” was replaced with “supporting dancer.”

Several new definitions were added to the Dance section, including Executing Dancer, which is defined as “a participant who is supported by another person while off the performing surface or who is in weight-bearing contact with a supporting dancer/prop.” Other new definitions were approved for Assisted Walkover, Kip Up and Nugget.

Among actual dance rules revisions, in Rule 3-2-5, the committee approved a Note stating that “a spotter should be in a position to have the quickest or cleanest path to protect an executing dancer from falling off the back of a skill.”

“The Spirit Rules Committee has spent the past year reorganizing the rules book to distinguish cheerleading and dance/drill more clearly, addressing confusion between the two activities,” Weaver said. “These updates aim to ensure that the language in the dance rules is specific to dance, rather than adapted from cheer rules.”

A complete listing of the spirit rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. Click on the “Activities & Sports” at the top of the home page and select “Spirit.” The print version of the 2025-26 Spirit Rules Book will be available for purchase in late May at www.NFHS.com, and the digital version will be available in the same timeframe via NFHS Digital at www.NFHS.org.

According to the most recent NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, spirit is the eighth-most popular sport for girls with 181,023 participants in 7,827 schools nationwide.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,800 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 8 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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