Special Olympics Ohio

Competitive Cheer Rules Manual (Rev. 10-2026)

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Competitive Cheer shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon the International Cheer Union (ICU) rules for Special Abilities cheerleading found at www.cheerunion.org. ICU rules shall be employed, however specific modifications to these rules along with divisioning guidelines are found in this manual. In all cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules Article 1 shall apply.

Special Olympics Ohio will follow the safety rules as set forth by ICU. The ICU Rules and regulations have already instated modifications specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Ohio has created additional provisions to compliment the ICU's Special Abilities Rules and are found below. These additional provisions include specific division guidelines for Special Olympics Ohio. Coaches are responsible for following the safety rules and following the skills progression for athletes and Unified partners.

All Special Olympics Ohio regional and state level competitions will enforce the participation regulations for athletes and Unified partners, of which is derived from Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sport Rules. This rule shall be that each team and/or individual athlete or Unified partner, must play all eligible and rostered team members in every game unless a player is injured or has been removed due to disciplinary reasons. Coaches must notify the competition management prior to each game if players on the approved tournament roster will not be playing due to injury or disciplinary reasons, and this needs to be approved by the tournament director. Failure to play all eligible team members in each game will result in forfeit and disqualification.

Please note: This rule book has been changed and updated extensively compared to the previous version. Please review this carefully. Additionally, as mentioned recently in memos and various meetings, these new rules and regulations will be followed here forward, beginning with the 2026/2027 Cheerleading season. Additionally, regional competition will begin for the 2027/2028 Cheerleading season and will follow our win-to-advance model in which teams who earn gold at competition in their assigned divisions will advance to state.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

The official SOOH Competitive Cheer season starts in October and runs through the state competition which is held during the first quarter of each year.

Special Olympics Ohio provides a range of events to offer athletes of varying abilities the opportunity to compete. Coaches are responsible for providing training and event selection appropriate to each athlete's skill and interest. Official score sheets can be found in Appendix A in the back of this manual. The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics Ohio.

- Team Non-Mount & Non-Tumble
- Team Mount & Tumble
- Unified

Teams who compete in the events above will be divisioned together by event, unless registration warrants divisions to be separated by team size. Each division will be evaluated based on the rubrics below. Additionally, guidelines on what certain scores may look like and how to interpret the scoresheets are provided below in Appendix B to help guide routine creation and help prepare for competitions.

TEAM COMPETITION

The purpose of cheerleading is to entertain and motivate a crowd to cheer for a team. These routines incorporate cheer, dance, stunts, and/or tumbling in a routine.

Team Size

Special Olympics Ohio recommended team sizes are as follows:

- Small: Minimum of four (4) and maximum of fifteen (15)
- Large: Minimum of sixteen (16) and maximum of twenty-four (24)

Unless a competition warrants divisioning to be separated based on team size due to the number of registered teams for a competition, both small and large teams will be divisioned together.

UNIFIED SPORTS ® TEAM COMPETITION

Teams competing in this category should follow the Unified Sports Competitive Model. The ratio of athletes to Unified partners must be 1:1. In the event of an odd-numbered team, there must be one less Unified partner than total number of athletes.

Special Olympics Unified partners should not perform any skills above the level of the Special Olympics athletes on the team.

NON-COMPETITIVE CHEER

A Local Special Olympics Program may choose to offer a non-competitive cheer option, for Special Olympics Traditional and/or Unified Teams, which provides the opportunity for cheering and performing at Special Olympics competitions, special events, sporting events, and community-based events such as walks, races, high school games, etc. Providing non-competitive cheer opportunities can help generate awareness and contribute to the growth of a Competitive Cheer program.

Non-Competitive Cheerleading

- All safety rules apply; team size & composition is open to the discretion of the team director within Special Olympics Guidelines.

- Opportunities for non-competitive cheer may be presented at varying regional and state level sporting events. Further information will be shared by the tournament director should this apply.

Appendix A

Competitive Cheer Scoresheet Team Non-Mount and Non-Tumble

Team Name	Level	Division	Team Size

CROWD LEADING	Points	Score
Crowd Effectiveness	5	

COMMENTS:

INCORPORATIONS	Points	Score
Proper Use of Skills to Lead Crowd	5	
Use of Poms, signs, and megaphones	5	
Execution of incorporations	5	

COMMENTS:

OVERALL	Points	Score
Uniform Appearance	5	
Overall Impression	10	

COMMENTS:

JUMPS	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

DANCE	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

TIME LIMIT	Points	Score
Under 3:00	1	

COMMENTS:

TOTAL	Points	Score
	56	

Competitive Cheer Scoresheet Team Mount and Tumble

Team Name	Level	Division	Team Size

CROWD LEADING	Points	Score
Crowd Effectiveness	5	

COMMENTS:

INCORPORATIONS	Points	Score
Proper Use of Skills to Lead Crowd	5	
Use of Poms, signs, and megaphones	5	
Execution of incorporations	5	

COMMENTS:

OVERALL	Points	Score
Uniform Appearance	5	
Overall Impression	10	

COMMENTS:

JUMPS	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

DANCE	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

PARTNER STUNTS, PYRAMIDS, GROUP TUMBLING	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

TIME LIMIT	Points	Score
Under 3:00	1	

COMMENTS:

TOTAL	Points	Score
	66	

Competitive Cheer Scoresheet Team Unified

Team Name	Level	Division	Team Size

CROWD LEADING	Points	Score
Crowd Effectiveness	5	

COMMENTS:

INCORPORATIONS	Points	Score
Proper Use of Skills to Lead Crowd	5	
Use of Poms, signs, and megaphones	5	
Execution of incorporations	5	

COMMENTS:

OVERALL	Points	Score
Uniform Appearance	5	
Overall Impression	10	

COMMENTS:

JUMPS	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

JUMPS	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

DANCE	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

PARTNER STUNTS, PYRAMIDS, GROUP TUMBLING	Points	Score
Execution	5	
Difficulty	5	

COMMENTS:

UNIFIED TEAMWORK	Points	Score
Partner and Athlete Interaction/Equal Participation	5	

COMMENTS:

TIME LIMIT	Points	Score
Under 3:00	1	

COMMENTS:

TOTAL	Points	Score
	71	

Appendix B

Competitive Cheer Team Scoresheet Explanation

CROWD LEADING (5 Points)

Evaluates the team's ability to engage and energize the audience.

Judges are looking for:

- Loud, clear voices
- Enthusiasm and confidence
- Audience participation
- Strong leadership throughout the routine

4-5 Points	• The crowd clearly responds to cheers and chants. • Voices are loud and understandable. • The team demonstrates enthusiasm and confidence. • Audience participation is encouraged throughout the routine.
2-3 Points	• Some crowd engagement. • Inconsistent energy to projection. • Limited audience response.
0-1 Point	• Minimal Crowd Involvement. • Difficulty hearing or understanding cheers. • Little effort to engage the audience.

INCORPORATIONS (15 Points)

Proper Use of Skills to Lead Crowd (5 Points)

Evaluates whether cheer skills are used appropriately to support crowd engagement.

Judges are looking for:

- Appropriate motions
- Formation changes
- Visual effects
- Skills that encourage audience participation

4-5 Points	• Skills clearly enhance crowd leadership. • Skills fit naturally into the routine. • Timing and creativity.
2-3 Points	• Some skills enhance crown involvement. • Skills occasionally interrupt flow.
0-1 Point	• Skills appear random or unnecessary. • Little connection between skills and crowd engagement.

Use of Poms, Signs and Megaphones (5 Points)

Evaluates how effectively props are incorporated into the routine.

Judges are looking for:

- Creative use of props
- Proper handling
- Visual effectiveness
- Enhancement of crowd interaction

4-5 Points	• Props enhance the routine. • Creative and effective use. • Props are used safely and confidently.

2-3 Points	• Props are used but inconsistently. • Limited impact on performance.
0-1 Point	• Props distract from the routine. • Improper or ineffective use.

Execution of Incorporations (5 Points)

Evaluates the quality of execution while using incorporated skills and props.

Judges are looking for:

- Timing
- Precision
- Smooth transitions
- Team Synchronization

4-5 Points	• Clean execution throughout. • Team synchronization. • Smooth Transitions.
2-3 Points	• Minor timing or execution errors.
0-1 Point	• Frequent Mistakes. • Poor Timing. • Disorganized performance.

OVERALL (15 Points)

Uniform Appearance (5 Points)

Evaluates the overall presentation of the team.

Judges are looking for:

- Matching uniforms
- Neat appearance
- Appropriate footwear
- Overall presentation

4-5 Points	• The team presents a polished appearance. • Uniforms are clean and coordinated.
2-3 Points	• Minor inconsistencies in appearance.
0-1 Point	• Uniform appearance distracts from performance.

Overall Impression (10 Points)

Evaluates the overall quality and entertainment value of the routine.

Judges are looking for:

- Confidence
- Energy
- Creativity
- Performance quality
- Audience impact
- Sportsmanship

8-10 Points	• Memorable performance. • High Energy. • Strong Teamwork. • Excellent entertainment value.

4-7 Points	• Solid performance with room for improvement.
0-1 Point	• Routine lacks energy or organization.

JUMPS (10 Points)

Execution (5 Points)

Evaluates the technical performance of jumps.

Judges are looking for:

- Proper body position
- Controlled landings
- Synchronization

4-5 Points	• Great Technique. • Controlled landings. • Team synchronization.
2-3 Points	• Minor form or timing errors.
0-1 Point	• Poor technique. • Uncontrolled landings. • Significant timing issues.

Difficulty (5 Points)

Evaluates the complexity of jump skills performed.

Judges are looking for:

- Variety of jumps
- Advanced jump combinations
- Appropriate challenge for the team

4-5 Points	• Multiple difficult jumps. • Variety of jumps.
2-3 Points	• Moderate difficulty.
0-1 Point	• Limited Variety. • Basic Skills only.

DANCE (10 Points)

Execution (5 Points)

Evaluates technical performance of the dance.

Judges are looking for:

- Timing
- Precision
- Synchronization
- Performance Quality

4-5 Points	• Clean, synchronized performance. • Strong confidence.
2-3 Points	• Minor synchronization errors.
0-1 Point	• Frequent timing or execution mistakes.

Difficulty (5 Points)

Evaluates the complexity of dance choreography.

Judges are looking for:

- Variety of movements
- Creative choreography
- Level Changes
- Formation Changes

4-5 Points	• Challenging choreography. • Creative routine.
2-3 Points	• Moderate complexity.
0-1 Point	• Simple choreography.

PARTNER STUNTS, PYRAMIDS, GROUP TUMBLING (10 Points)

Execution (5 Points)

Evaluates the quality and safety of stunt performance.

Judges are looking for:

- Proper technique
- Stability
- Control
- Safety
- Synchronization

4-5 Points	• Skills performed confidently and safely. • Control and techniques.
2-3 Points	• Minor balance or execution errors.
0-1 Point	• Significant technique issues.

	• Safety concerns. • Multiple execution errors.

Difficulty (5 Points)

Evaluates the complexity of stunts, pyramids, and tumbling.

Judges are looking for:

- Variety of Skills
- Difficulty Level
- Creative Combinations
- Appropriate challenge for the team

4-5 Points	• Advanced skills performed successfully. • Excellent variety.
2-3 Points	• Moderate difficulty.
0-1 Point	• Limited skill variety, • Basic Skills.

UNIFIED PARTNERSHIP AND INCLUSION (5 Points)

Partner and Athlete Interaction/ Equal Participation

Evaluates how well athletes and Unified partners work together while demonstrating meaningful inclusion throughout the routine.

Judges are looking for:

- Equal participation between athletes and Unified partners
- Positive interaction and encouragement
- Meaningful roles for all team members
- Shared leadership and teamwork
- Inclusion throughout the entire performance

4-5 Points	• Athletes and Unified partners contribute equally throughout the routine. • Teamwork and inclusion are evident in all aspects of the performance. • Partners support athletes without overshadowing them. • Every participant has a meaningful role.
2-3 Points	• Most team members participate actively. • Inclusion is evident but inconsistent. • Some participants have more prominent roles than others.
0-1 Point	• Limited interaction between athletes and partners. • Unified partners dominate the routine. • Some athletes have little meaningful participation. • Inclusion is not consistently demonstrated.