



CHEER STARS

Information guide for coaches

Mini and Primary divisions

From ranking to development

About this guide

This guide explains how the Cheer STARS model works and how coaches can align their routines, training and expectations with it. The PowerPoint presentation is the primary source of information. The additional coaching guidance translates that presentation into practical advice for the Mini and Primary divisions.

Important: Cheer STARS replaces traditional ranking with development-focused recognition. Teams are not compared with one another. Each star is awarded on the basis of predefined criteria.

Content

About this guide	2
Content	2
1. Purpose and philosophy	4
2. How the system works	4
3. The stars at a glance	5
5. Building a routine for Cheer STARS	16
6. Using feedback after the competition	16
7. Frequently asked questions	17
8. Benefits for athletes and coaches	18

1. Purpose and philosophy

Traditional ranking can place strong emphasis on scores and comparison at a young age. Cheer STARS shifts attention towards development, sound fundamentals, teamwork and enjoyment while preserving a genuine competition experience. We also believe this will reduce drop out.

From	To and what this means for coaches
Ranking	Development goals: Build a routine around mastery and growth, not around beating other teams.
Difficulty as a status symbol	Technique before difficulty: A simple element performed correctly is more valuable than a difficult element performed without control.
One overall result	Several specific stars: Coaches can see the areas in which the team is strong and where further training is needed.
Competition pressure	Positive competition experience: Athletes receive achievable goals, recognition and motivation without a traditional ranking.

What remains important?

- All routines must comply with the applicable rules for the division and level (see ICU safety rules & regulations).
- Safety always remains the highest priority.
- Coaches remain responsible for selecting a realistic, well-practiced and age-appropriate routine.
- The competition remains a genuine performance opportunity: athletes demonstrate what they have mastered as a team.

2. How the system works

Teams are not ranked against one another. They can earn seven different stars based on predefined development goals: Safety, Complete Routine, Technique, Skill, Synchronization, Performance and Hit Zero.

Key judging principles

- The routine and selected skills must be appropriate for the team's division and level.
- Judges assess what the team shows on the competition floor, not what was planned or achieved in training.
- One minor isolated imperfection will not be taken into consideration for the stars.
- The Skill Star can only be awarded if the Technique Star has been earned.
- Each competition you will start with a clean sheet to earn the stars.

How results and stars are communicated

Judges record the official result in the Cheer STARS Google Sheet. After the judges validate the seven decisions, the awards desk prepares a certificate for each team showing the stars earned.

3. The stars at a glance

Star	What is it awarded for?	Key question for the coach
Safety Star	A fully legal routine with no safety deductions.	Is every element legal, age-appropriate and safely prepared?
Complete Routine Star	All required cheerleading components are clearly present.	Does the routine contain all required components?
Technique Star	Correct execution, control and stability.	Have the selected skills been technically mastered?
Skill Star	Development of level-appropriate stunts, tumbling, pyramids and baskets where applicable.	Does the team demonstrate progression without compromising technique or safety?
Synchronization Star	Good timing, coordination and team unity throughout the routine.	Does the team move as one unit?
Performance Star	Energy, natural expression, audience awareness and commitment.	Are the athletes performing, or merely executing elements?
Hit Zero Star	A clean routine with no falls, major building errors, safety deductions or illegalities.	Can the team perform this routine consistently and without major errors?



SAFETY STAR

Promotes safe participation and routines appropriate for the athletes' age, division and level.

Core principle: Safety comes first. Every skill and transition must be legal, age-appropriate and safely executed.

Key question

Was the entire routine performed legally, without safety deductions or illegal skills?

Award criteria

- The routine is executed fully legal.
- No safety deductions are issued.
- No illegal skills are performed.
- No warnings are given.

Coach guidance

- Check every element against the current ICU rulebook for the correct division and level.
- Do not include an element simply because it worked once in training; it must be safe, repeatable and sufficiently prepared.
- Also check transitions, catches, dismounts, spotters and connections. An illegality may occur during the execution of a skill, not only in its final position.
- Carry out a separate legality check of the routine and video recording before the competition.

Situation	Interpretation
Star likely awarded	All skills and transitions are legal; no safety deduction is issued.
Star not awarded	An illegal stunt or other illegal element is performed, or the legality judge issues a safety deduction or warning

Coach focus: The safest choice is not necessarily the simplest choice, but it is one the team has technically mastered and can perform legally and consistently.



COMPLETE ROUTINE STAR

Encourages teams to demonstrate the different fundamental components of cheerleading in one complete routine.

Core principle: A complete routine clearly and deliberately includes every required cheerleading component applicable to the team's division and level.

Key question

Can the judges clearly identify every required routine component that applies to this division and level?

Award criteria

- Cheer
- Motions
- Jumps
- Stunts (building skills)
- Tumbling
- Pyramid
- Basket tosses when required at the applicable level

For this star, the focus is on presence rather than difficulty or quality. Every required component must be clearly recognizable in the routine and performed by half of the team.

Component	What judges must be able to identify	How coaches can make it clear
Cheer	A clearly identifiable cheer section, distinct from dance or general choreography.	Give the section enough time and structure to be recognized. The vocal content and presentation should visibly function as cheer.
Motions	A clearly identifiable use of cheer motions within the routine.	Include an intentional motion sequence or section, ex. during transitions.
Jumps	One or more clearly recognizable, legal cheer group jump.	Present the group jump element as a deliberate part of the routine. The type and difficulty must remain appropriate for the division and level.
Stunts (building skills)	Two clearly identifiable legal stunts or building sections.	Show athletes in recognizable building roles. Entries, the stunt position and the dismount should make the section visibly different from ordinary choreography.
Tumbling	Clearly recognizable, legal group tumbling appropriate to the division and level.	Simple group tumbling is sufficient when it is clearly shown. Place it so judges can distinguish it from dance, floor work or a transition. A jump does not count for tumbling.

Pyramid	A clearly recognizable pyramid section that meets the definition and rules for the applicable level.	Do not assume that a regular sequence of isolated stunts will automatically read as a pyramid. Check the current rules and make the pyramid moment visually distinct.
Basket tosses	A clearly recognizable legal group basket toss — only when baskets are permitted at the team's level.	If baskets are not permitted at the level, they are not required for this star. Never add a basket solely to complete the list when the rules prohibit it.

Coach guidance

- Every applicable component is legal for the division and level.
- Each component is long and clear enough to be recognized as a deliberate routine element.
- The pyramid is visibly distinguishable from a regular stunt section.
- Basket tosses are included only when permitted; otherwise, they are not required.
- A video review allows another person to identify every component without explanation from the coach.
- Minimum half of the team-athletes are performing the element.



TECHNIQUE STAR

Recognizes correct execution, body control and stability.

Core principle: A simple skill performed correctly is more valuable than a difficult skill performed incorrectly.

Key question

Were the skills performed with correct technique, control and stability?

Judging focus

Component	Positive indicators	Indicators that further training is needed
Motions	Sharp, controlled motions, clear placement and strong posture.	Repeated incorrect placement, weak posture or limited control.
Jumps	Good body positions, a controlled landing, correct arm placement, straight knees and pointed toes.	Uncontrolled landings, bent legs, flexed toes or consistently weak positions.
Tumbling	Control, correct body alignment, stable landing and safe completion.	Several uncontrolled skills, poor alignment and frequent loss of balance.
Building	Stable execution, controlled entries/dismounts, strong flyer positions and good base/spotter technique.	Repeated instability, technical errors and weak body positions.
Overall body control	Athletes have good body awareness; skills look practiced, prepared and controlled.	Skills look rushed or unprepared; large parts of the routine lack control.

Reasonable standard: Technique is assessed across the routine. One small, isolated imperfection does not automatically remove the star when the athlete recovers quickly, and the overall standard remains clear.

Award criteria

- Achieved: the selected skills demonstrate correct technique, body control and stability.
- Development point: simplify the skill or continue training when control, technique or stability is not yet sufficiently demonstrated.



SKILL STAR

Encourages the development of new, level-appropriate skills while maintaining a strong focus on technique and safety.

Core principle: Skill development is rewarded, not risk-taking. The Technique Star is a mandatory requirement.

Key question

Does the team demonstrate safe, technically controlled and level-appropriate development across the applicable skill sections?

Award criteria

Decision rule: The Skill Star cannot be awarded without the Technique Star.

Judging focus

- Level-appropriate stunts
- Level-appropriate tumbling
- Level-appropriate pyramids
- Level-appropriate baskets where applicable
- Other legal skills that demonstrate clear progression

Purpose. The Skill Star recognizes visible development through level-appropriate skills in the relevant sections of the routine. It rewards progression that remains safe and technically controlled; it is not based on a public list of named skills or a single showcase athlete.

Supporting guidance

Section	What level-appropriate development means	Evidence coaches should show
Stunts	The routine shows legal stunt progression appropriate to the division and level, while maintaining control and safe execution.	More than half of the athletes participating in the stunt section must successfully perform the presented skill or progression. Athletes are counted individually, regardless of whether a stunt uses one, two or three bases.
Tumbling	The routine shows legal tumbling development appropriate to the division and level. The judging focus is visible progression, not a published checklist of named tumbling skills.	Select tumbling that represents genuine development for the athletes who perform it and that can still meet the Technique Star standard.
Pyramids	The pyramid section shows legal, level-appropriate development in its	The progression must be clearly visible within the pyramid section and should

	structure, connections, transitions or coordinated execution.	involve the team roles required to create that pyramid and be successfully performed or supported by more than half of the athletes participating in that section.
Basket tosses	When baskets are permitted and included, the basket section shows legal, level-appropriate development with safe and controlled execution.	Baskets are assessed only where applicable. If baskets are prohibited at the level, they are not required and their absence does not prevent the Skill Star.

Why no published skill list? A fixed list can quickly turn the star into a difficulty race and may encourage teams to train one exact element only. Section-based descriptors keep the focus on development, allow different legal progressions and support judge calibration without prescribing one compulsory skill.

Award indicators

Indicator	What the judges see
Positive	The team demonstrates level-appropriate stunts, tumbling, pyramids and baskets where applicable, while maintaining technique and safety.
Development point	The selected skills are not yet appropriate for the level or have not yet been mastered with sufficient technique and safety.

Difficulty is always considered in relation to the division and level. A team does not need to demonstrate maximum difficulty. It must show that its athletes are progressing within what they can perform safely and technically.



SYNCHRONIZATION STAR

Rewards timing, uniformity, coordination and teamwork.

Core principle: Teams succeed together.

Key question

Did the team perform the routine with timing, coordination and team unity?

Judging focus

- Motions
- Jumps
- Dance
- Tumbling
- Building sequences
- Transitions and formation changes

Aspect	Positive indicators	Indicators that further training is needed
Timing	Athletes start and finish together; motions and jumps are performed simultaneously.	Repeated timing differences; jumps or movements are performed at different times.
Uniformity	Consistent motion placement and choreography.	Major differences in placement, execution or timing.
Teamwork	The routine feels connected; formations and transitions are performed together.	Athletes appear disconnected from one another; formations are inconsistent.

Coach focus: Train timing, coordination and team unity as separate development goals, then combine them in complete routines.



PERFORMANCE STAR

Encourages active performance with energy, natural expression and connection with the audience and judges.

Core principle: Athletes perform; they do not merely execute skills.

Key question

Do the athletes actively perform with energy, natural expression, audience awareness and commitment throughout the routine?

Judging focus

Aspect	Positive indicators	Indicators that further training is needed
Energy	Visible enthusiasm and a consistent level of energy.	Low energy or a clear drop in energy during large parts of the routine.
Natural expression	Authentic expression appropriate to the style and music; visible enjoyment and confidence.	Absent or forced expression; athletes appear uncomfortable or disconnected.
Audience awareness	Athletes engage with the audience and judges and project confidence.	Frequently looking at the floor and making little attempt to connect.
Commitment	Performance remains visible during transitions and after a mistake, through to the end.	Athletes stop performing during transitions or after mistakes.

Coach focus: Performance should be trained in sections, transitions and full routines. Athletes do not need identical facial expressions, but the team should share a confident performance intention.

Coach guidance

- Train performance not only during full-outs, but also in short sections and transitions.
- Encourage natural, age-appropriate expression; avoid exaggerated or uncomfortable expectations.
- Teach athletes to re-engage with the routine after a mistake without losing their performance completely.



HIT ZERO STAR

Recognizes a clean and safe performance without major errors.

Core principle: Hit Zero means zero deductions. The routine does not need to be the most difficult routine, but it must be performed cleanly, safely and legally from beginning to end.

Key question

Was the complete routine performed cleanly, with no falls, major building errors, safety deductions or illegal skills?

Award criteria

- No individual falls.
- No building falls
- No major building errors.
- No safety deductions or warnings
- No illegal skills.

Decision rule: One deductible occurrence in any applicable category means that the Hit Zero Star is not awarded.

Definitions — individual athlete errors

Athlete Fall

An athlete drops to the performance surface during a tumbling or jump skill.

Includes: one or both hands down; one or both knees down; an incomplete tumbling twist; or a landing that is not completed on the feet.

Does not include: an athlete simply tripping while walking during a transition.

Definitions — building errors

Major Building error

A stunt, pyramid, toss or transition almost drops but is saved before becoming a complete building fall.

Includes: an unintended lowering from extended to prep level; a base or spotter touching the floor; a top person leaning or bearing weight on a base/spotter and being pushed back up; a bracer preventing a pyramid fall; or the top person's hands/feet contacting the floor during a cradle or prone catch.

Does not include: a body-position change, a small balance check, base movement without loss of height/alignment, an omitted skill or a timing issue alone.

Building Fall

A stunt, pyramid, toss or building transition drops from its intended position.

Includes: a drop to a cradle, load-in or prone position; or a single-base stunt dropping to the performance surface while the top person is still assisted by the base or spotter.

Does not include lowering from extended to prep level, which is normally classified as a Building error.

Coach guidance

Hit Zero is an additional recognition for a routine that is performed cleanly and safely on competition day. The star does not mean that the routine was the most difficult; it recognizes stability, preparation and an execution with no major errors.

Coach focus: Choose a routine that the team can repeat even under competition pressure. Consistency is more important than a final, insufficiently prepared upgrade.

5. Building a routine for Cheer STARS

A strong Cheer STARS routine is not created by ticking off stars afterwards. Build it from the outset around safety, completeness, mastery, teamwork and performance training.

Recommended approach

1. First determine what is legal and realistic for the division, level, age and training volume.
2. Create a routine map containing all required components for the Complete Routine Star.
3. For each component, select skills that the athletes have technically mastered.
4. Only then add level-appropriate progression for the Skill Star.
5. Set separate training goals for timing, uniformity and transitions.
6. Train energy, expression and audience awareness from the start.
7. Test the complete routine for legality, physical demands and repeatability.
8. Simplify in good time if technique, synchronization or safety begins to deteriorate.

Order of priorities when in doubt

Priority	Why
1. Safety and legality	An illegal or unsafe choice undermines the entire development objective.
2. Technique and control	Mastery provides the foundation for further progression.
3. Completeness	Make sure all required sections are visible.
4. Synchronization	Perform the selected material together and uniformly.
5. Performance	Enable athletes to present the material with confidence.
6. Additional difficulty	Only add it when the previous layers remain stable.

6. Using feedback after the competition

A star that was not earned is not a punishment. It shows which development goal was not yet sufficiently demonstrated in the routine. Coaches can translate the stars into specific training actions.

Star not earned	Possible meaning	Next training focus
Safety	Illegality or safety deduction.	Knowledge of the rules, routine adjustments and repetition of safe technique.
Complete Routine	One or more required components were missing or not recognizable.	Revise the routine map and clearly integrate the missing component.
Technique	Too many technical errors or insufficient control.	Simplification, drills, body positions and stable repetitions.

Star not earned	Possible meaning	Next training focus
Skill	No Technique Star or insufficient level-appropriate skill development.	First stabilize technique; then work purposefully on level-appropriate stunts, tumbling, pyramids and baskets where applicable.
Synchronization	Timing and uniformity were too inconsistent.	Counts, timing drills, visual uniformity and transition work.
Performance	Energy, expression or audience awareness was not sufficiently consistent.	Performance blocks, projection, confidence and continuing to perform after mistakes.
Hit Zero	Fall, major building error, safety deduction or illegality.	Analyze the cause and make the routine more stable or simpler.

7. Frequently asked questions

Are teams still ranked?

No. Under the Cheer STARS model described here, teams are not ranked against one another. They earn stars on the basis of fixed development criteria.

Does a routine have to be difficult to earn many stars?

No. Technique, safety, completeness, synchronization and performance can also be demonstrated through simple, well-mastered skills.

Can a team earn the Skill Star without the Technique Star?

No, the Skill Star can only be awarded after the Technique Star has been earned.

Does one mistake automatically cost a star?

The presentation only specifies concrete disqualifying events for Safety and Hit Zero. Further practical judging procedures will be included in the final judging and competition information.

Does every athlete have to be perfectly synchronized?

The Synchronization Star rewards timing, coordination and team unity. Coaches should therefore aim for a routine that is performed as one cohesive unit.

Does difficulty count towards the Complete Routine Star?

No. This star is based on whether the required components are clearly present; difficulty and quality of execution are separate judging objectives.

What if baskets are not permitted at the level?

A basket toss is then not a required component. The presentation expressly states that basket tosses are only included when they are permitted at the level.

8. Benefits for athletes and coaches

For athletes	For coaches
Less pressure from direct ranking.	Clearer feedback for training priorities.
A positive competition experience.	A stronger focus on fundamentals and safety.
Clear goals and recognition for progress.	Support for routine planning and progression.
Greater confidence and motivation.	A framework for long-term athlete development.
A stronger sense of teamwork.	Specific goals for technique, synchronization and performance.

Why this matters: Cheer STARS helps keep young athletes engaged, develop strong foundations, participate safely and experience healthy competition.