

UNL Yell Squad: Footwork and pompons

By Susie Reitz

With basketballs bouncing in the background, the UNL Yell Squad works daily in the Coliseum for the approaching basketball season.

With football season drawing to a close, the squad prepares more dance and intricate footwork routines, captain Sandy Weyer of Columbus said.

Veteran cheerleader Nancy Mohrman of Fargo, N.D., explained the difference between football and basketball routines. "In football you have to use exaggerated moves so even people in the 95th row can see them. In basketball you're closer to the crowd and don't have as much room to work."

Football cheers are done with pompons, but the shakers are used only in pregame routines for basketball.

Eleven on squad

The squad consists of eight women and three men. Members are: Julie Hurt, Fremont; Nanci Jones, Omaha; Penny Legate, Ogallala; Kevin Meyer, Beatrice; Mohrman; Rhonda Shepard, South Sioux City; Garry Smith, Sioux City, Iowa; Jill Wanamaker, Rock Port, Mo.; Weyer; Janie Whitfield, Omaha; and Gary Willets, Lexington.

The squad travels to all out of state conference football games, yell leader Willets said.

"We've gone to non-conference games, too, like Wisconsin last year," Smith said, "but we had to find our own way. For conference games we travel with the pep band." Nebraska didn't play any away non-conference games this year.

"We usually leave early in the morning and come back right after the game," Weyer said.

The Yell Squad travelled with the march-

ing band to the Sugar Bowl last year and stayed in Loyola University dormitories in New Orleans.

Uniforms passed down

Uniforms are passed down from year to year, but the squad members must buy their own shoes, socks and some of the accessories.

"A lot of people don't realize that we have to get new pompons every other game," Mohrman said. "You just shake them apart."

Cheering is most frightening the first time, Kevin Meyers said, adding, "You sort of get used to it after a while."

"The first couple of games are scary, until you realize that not all of the 76,000 people in the stadium are looking at you," said Willets.

Basketball different

"Basketball is different because you can hear the crowd," Smith, the only veteran on the squad, said. "The football crowds are hard to organize."

When the crowd is not as enthusiastic, Smith said, he acts "more crazy" to get their attention and start chants.

Part of the attention-getting includes wearing an old raccoon coat over his red and white striped sweater and waving an old golf hat.

"We try to show our excitement and how psyched we are for the game," Willets said.

Dance steps and chants

"We're more pompon squad than a cheerleading squad," said first-year cheerleader Whitfield. "We do more dancing and short chants than long cheers."

To add variety to old routines, the squad is adding new dance steps from the Hustle and the Bump to their routines, Weyer said.



Photo by Kevin Higley

Julie Hurt, sophomore from Fremont, is one of eight women on Yell Squad.

The UNL squad is the only Big 8 unit with "The Step" in its routines, Weyer said.

Demonstrating The Step, Mohrman explained "you step on the ball of your foot and sort of rock back on first one foot then the other but your heels don't touch the ground. It's really hard on your legs."

Wanamaker said, "The Step was the hardest thing to learn for cheerleading tryouts," and Whitfield added, "it's even harder when you try to put it with arm movements before you have it learned."

Cheerleader selections

Cheerleader candidates learn two complete routines. Semi-finalists are chosen from tryouts with former cheerleaders and final selection is based on individual performance, Weyer said. Adviser William Murphy makes the selection.

Candidates attend practice every week day for a month until selections are made shortly before spring break, Weyer said. The original 100 women trying out are reduced to about 40 by the end of the month.

For yell king tryouts, the male candidates must do a cheer of their own creation and four lifts. About a dozen tried out for the positions last year, Smith said.

Men practice for about two weeks before spring break, Smith said.

"After spring break is when the real work comes in," he said. "The girls try to learn a routine a day and learn about 20 different routines before school is out."

Weyer said squad members are evaluated throughout the year and are asked back if they do a good job.



Photo by Mark Bell

Dexter Green, Iowa State's freshman tailback, scored his first touchdown against Colorado in the Cyclones' 27-28 loss.



Photo by Jeff Heger

Junior split end Bobby Thomas (8) is one of Nebraska's leading receivers.