

Information Manual For New Cheer Parents



Welcome to WWP Pop Warner Cheerleading! We are so happy to have you as part of the Wildcat family! Hopefully this manual will answer some of your initial questions and give you basic information about the fun team you have just joined!

BASIC STRUCTURE

Within the Pop Warner structure, there are a number of different levels, for both football and cheer. WWP tries to have the same levels for football and cheer each year, but that doesn't always work out. It is harder for football as there are stricter age and weight requirements at each level, for player safety. Within cheer, there are also age requirements for each level, but there is a lot of overlap and room for shifting players between teams to ensure equity and the strongest teams possible. This shifting happens before the season starts or perhaps in the first week of practice, but then teams are set for the remainder of the season.

Pop Warner levels and approximate ages for cheer:

FLAG – ages 5-7

TINY MITES – ages 5-8

MITEY-MITES – ages 7-9

JR. PEEWEE – ages 8-11

PEEWEE – ages 9-12

JUNIOR VARSITY – ages 10-13

VARSITY – ages 12-16

Each year it is unlikely that there will be cheer teams at all levels. There almost always is a Flag and Mitey-Mite (MM) squad, but beyond that the squads will depend on how many girls sign up and their ages and experience levels. The Cheer Commissioner and coaches reserve the right to place your daughter on any team in which she qualifies, based on age, safety, skill set and the needs of the program. (Ages are also subject to change based on Pop Warner rules.)

(The levels are the same for football although there could also be an “UNLIMITED” football team which is generally older, larger players – a combination of JV/Varsity players if there aren't enough for separate teams.)

PRACTICES

Cheer practice in August takes place next to the practice football fields in Community Park. Drive into the park, pass the pool on the right and the softball field on the left. You will see signs for Wildcat parking. There is a small lot on the right side after the practice field – DO NOT park there unless you are a coach! Instead, park in the large lot on the left side, by the playground. Even if you are dropping your daughter off, please park by the playground and walk her over – especially at the beginning of the season, it is very busy and really unsafe to have kids just dropped off by the fence.

Flag and MM cheer usually practice closer to the entrance to the park. In that case, enter the park and pull into the parking lot near the pool, but do not park by the pool – instead park close to the football field before the skate park.

The start date for August practices will be announced on the Wildcats website and in emails. Usually in August, Flag and MM cheer squads practice on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights, from 6:30-8 pm. Older cheer squads practice Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights, from 6:30-8:30 pm. It is important that your daughter is at these early practices because every girl is required to have a certain number of “conditioning” hours before she can begin tumbling and stunting. If too many girls delay finishing their conditioning hours, it pushes the whole schedule back.

If at all possible, please try not to schedule full week family vacations during cheer season, including in August! If you have something scheduled that cannot be changed, please notify your coach as soon as possible so they can plan around your daughter’s absence. (Obviously this is all more important for the older squads.)

Once school starts, practices shift to Tuesday and Thursday nights for all girls, at the same times as above. Once it starts getting dark earlier (mid-September), practices will be moved inside one of the WWP school buildings. Your coach will let you know where to go. As the season progresses, absences are much more difficult to accommodate. A single girl’s absence could derail the entire team’s ability to practice certain parts of the routine (e.g., the pyramid). Please do everything you can to ensure your child is present at every practice after school starts.

For older squads additional practices will be added on Saturdays starting after Labor Day. Additionally, in many years, girls are able to do extra tumbling practice on Wednesday evenings. All details will come from your coach.

FOOTBALL GAMES

Flag cheerleaders cheer at Flag football games, Mitey-Mite cheerleaders cheer at MM football games, etc. In years where there aren't exact matches of cheer squads to football teams, cheer squads go where they are most needed or alternate between games. (For example, in 2018, there was a PeeWee cheer squad, and both a PeeWee football team and an Unlimited football team. The PW cheerleaders alternated cheering for the two football teams.)

Football games are every Sunday. Usually 4-5 games in a season are home games and take place at Community Park, at the far field in the park, just past the pavilion (pass the practice fields and keep going to the end of the road in the park). The other 4-5 games are away games, and can take place in towns like Hamilton, Monroe, East Brunswick, etc. (usually no more than 25-30 minutes away).

The schedule on Sundays (for home and away days) generally tries to follow this schedule (BUT NOT ALWAYS!):

1. Flag 9am-10am
2. Mitey-Mite 10am-11:30am
3. JV/Varsity/Unlimited 11:30-1:00pm
4. PeeWee 1:00-2:30pm
5. Jr. PeeWee 2:30-4:00pm

Flag games usually start at 9 am and last 60 minutes. The older level games last for approximately 90 minutes but may run over as they do not use a running clock.

The afternoon games play for four 15 minute quarters and the game clock starts and stops, so the games can run two hours or longer, and later games start accordingly.

You will get an approximate time for your squad's game each weekend but if you are on one of the older teams that cheers in the afternoon, be aware that you may have to wait a bit if an earlier game is running late. Your coach will tell you each week what time to be at the game.

Games are particularly important for the Flag and MM girls – this is their chance to shine! Older squads also go to competitions (see below) and their focus is usually more on those. Games are still important though as they give the girls time to practice performing together and work on teamwork and basic cheerleading skills, all while supporting the football teams.

UNIFORMS

Cheer uniforms consist of the following items:

- Skirt
- Long sleeved crop top
- Vest
- Poms
- Shorts
- Socks
- Bow
- White shoes

Skirts, crop tops, vests, and poms are given to the girls each August and need to be returned at the end of the season. (There are penalties for not returning the uniform; see below under “Volunteer requirements”.)

You will get instructions from your coach in the first week or two about where to buy shorts. Socks and bows will be provided to you and are included in your registration fee. The shorts usually cost around \$15 and can be bought online. Sometimes people will share orders to save on shipping costs – talk to your team “mom” or coach if you want to try to do this.

Bows will be given to each girl by the coach before the first game. Older girls may have two bows – one for games and one for competition. The cost for the bows is included in your registration fee.

Shoes – for Flag and MM, any white sneakers will work. For the older squads, any girl who is not a flyer can wear any white sneakers, although some of the more experienced cheerleaders have found a specific brand of shoe they particularly like (Infinity cheer shoes). These are expensive and do NOT need to be purchased unless you want to! If your daughter is a flyer (thrown up in the air!), then she does need specific shoes that are easier for the bases (the people doing the throwing) to grip. Ask your coach if you need advice on shoes. The coaches also often have a bin from year to year of used cheer shoes as girls out grow them – feel free to ask about this to save money, you might get lucky!

You will be told in July when uniform distribution will take place. EVERYONE is always confused the first time about where to go for uniform distribution! If you are standing at the pavilion looking out on the competition football field, on the far side of the field you will see a large metal building that looks like a barn/very large grey shed. The easiest way to get there is to park on the far side of the field in the parking lot by the tennis courts. Take N Mill Rd. off of Princeton Hightstown Rd. (if you are on Princeton Hightstown going towards High School South, N Mill is the right at the last light before you get to the high school.) Once on N Mill, the first right (that is not a house) is into a (dirt, muddy) parking lot. Park there and follow the path to the left behind the houses until you get to the shed. The turn into the parking lot is not lit and is hard to see if you don't know where you're going!

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

Wildcat Football and Cheer is a completely volunteer run organization. It could not survive without the incredible amounts of time that families contribute selflessly to make sure it is a fulfilling experience for all participants. To make things run smoothly, every participant's family has a volunteer requirement for the season. (You can pay to opt out of this requirement; as of the 2019 season the cost for opting out is \$175 per child.)

The way we ensure that every family fulfills their volunteer requirement is as follows: when you pick up your child's uniform, you will need to bring a check for \$175 made out to "West Windsor Jr. Football Club". You cannot get a uniform without handing in a check! **We will hold these checks and will NOT deposit them, UNLESS you a) do not complete your volunteer requirement(s), AND/OR b) do not return your child's complete uniform.** When you return the uniform at the end of the season, we will hand you your uncashed check so you can rip it up.

The volunteer requirements are as follows (these are subject to change):

PER ATHLETE

- FOUR volunteer shifts, including AT LEAST TWO concession shifts

General volunteer shifts include:

- Setting up fields early mornings of home games
- Holding line markers during a home game
- Helping at uniform distribution or return
- Serving as your child's team parent/photographer (one per team for the entire season; also requires putting together a short slide show for the end-of-season banquet) (fulfills both general volunteer shifts)
- Serving as your child's team assistant coach
- Helping ready concession stand for beginning of season or helping close concession stand at end of season

Assistant coaches, team parents, team photographers, and designated play counters are exempt from the assignment for the first child only. If you have more than one child in the football/cheer program, you will have to fulfill an additional assignment, but if you have more than two children in the program, you only need to do 8 shifts (including at least 4 concession shifts).

Concession duties include:

- Working at concession stand for two hours during a home game (selling snacks, drinks, etc.)
- Helping with grill during home games

There are other volunteer activities that can fulfill all your requirements for the season. Coaches and board members do not have to volunteer as they already contribute a great deal of time. If you are interested in helping with fundraisers or other organization-wide events (such as the bonfire or banquet), please just let the volunteer coordinator know.

Please be flexible! Games don't always start and end on time. If we are short handed in an area of volunteers, you may be asked to help out even though it is not the volunteer assignment area in which you were assigned.

All volunteers **MUST** sign in at the concessions stand in order to get credit for their assignment.

If you cannot work during the time slot that you are scheduled to volunteer, it is your responsibility to find a replacement or swap. Please be sure to notify the volunteer coordinator of the change as your name will be on the sign in sheet for the day in which you are assigned to work. If your replacement does not show for the assignment time, the "no show" will count against the family originally assigned to volunteer.

PLEASE SHOW UP ON TIME - SOMEONE IS WAITING FOR YOU TO RELIEVE THEM.

CHEER COMPETITIONS

There are multiple levels of cheer competitions.

Central Jersey

For Flag and MM, there is only one competition, called “Central Jersey.” This is not technically a competition for the Flag level, officially it is just an exhibition. But everyone talks about it as a competition and the younger girls feel like they are more like the “big girls” if they think it is a competition as well. So shhhh....don’t spill the beans! MM will compete at the Central Jersey level but they do not move on from there even if they win.

Central Jersey takes place in mid-October in Trenton, at the Sun Bank Arena. Your coach will let you know what time your daughter needs to arrive, in FULL UNIFORM. It is ESSENTIAL that you get your daughter there on time – the team CANNOT ENTER the arena until EVERY member of the team is present and in complete uniform with no jewelry and short, unpolished nails (yes, they actually check at the door!) (This means please do not pierce your daughter’s ears from June until after cheer season is over! They have to take their earrings out for competition!)

All Wildcat parents will sit in the same section to cheer on the girls. This has usually been section 108, but that may change. A few parents go to the arena (very) early, when it opens, to grab the section and set up decorations and lights. The competitive teams actually get or lose points based on audience support, so it is important to present a LOUD ENTHUSIASTIC cheering section!

There is (of course) a cost to get into the competition as a spectator (the cheerleaders are free). It is usually \$25/person although that may vary. Usually there is a very small window to pre-purchase tickets from your team “mom” and save a few dollars. Tickets have to be paid for in cash (yes, really!)

You will get specific details from your coach about what girls should bring to competitions, but generally bring a small backpack or bag with snacks and small games. There will be a lot of sitting around and waiting, both before they go on and after. Girls can bring phones but know that there is always a chance they could get lost or stolen, so coaches usually discourage bringing electronics. After they compete, the girls will usually be hungry, and will want whatever crap is available for sale at the arena (not the healthy snacks you sent from home!) So you may want to give them/give their coach a little cash to allow them to buy concessions.

For most families, the timeline is something like this:

- Drop your daughter off at the front of the stadium at whatever time you are told to.
- Leave for at least an hour (or bring a book to sit in the arena or your car!)
- Come back a half hour before the team is supposed to go on. Find a seat in the Wildcats section.
- Find out that everything is running anywhere from 15-45 minutes behind.
- Cheer really loudly for the 3-4 minutes that your daughter performs!
- Go out to the rope area in the arena lobby to congratulate/console your daughter.
- Say goodbye for a while until the presentation of awards (hopefully not more than an hour or so later).
- After awards, navigate the crazy rush of parents from all teams trying to find their children all in that same lobby area. Don't worry, it always works out! Your daughter's coaches will not let them wander off without a parent/relative picking them up!
- Collapse at home.

Eastern Region

For teams other than Flag and MM, if the team does well enough at Central Jersey (and they usually do), they will advance to Eastern Region. This competition is usually the first or second weekend in November, usually in the same arena in Trenton (but it has occasionally been held in upstate New York in the past). The schedule of the day is essentially the same.

PLEASE NOTE: One of the Eastern Region weekends almost always overlaps with NJ Education Week. This does not mean your daughter's team will compete that particular weekend, but we might – we usually won't know until mid-October on which weekend which teams will perform. We know a lot of families go out of town for that 4-day weekend. If you plan to be away for NJ Education Week, please let your coach know no later than mid-August so they can plan the routine accordingly.

States

The older teams may also add an additional competition to give the girls extra practice. This is called States, and is usually the last weekend in October, also usually in Trenton.

If the team does well enough at Eastern Region, then they advance to Nationals in DISNEY!!!!

Nationals (DISNEY)

(This does not apply to Flag and MM squads.)

From the beginning of August you will hear about “Disney” – and yes, it means Disney World in Florida. The first week in December Pop Warner holds their national cheer competition at the ESPN Wide World of Sports at Disney World. Getting to go to Nationals and compete is the goal that the squads are working towards all fall.

Going to Nationals is by no means likely, but it is always a possibility. In the last ten years, the Wildcats have had a team go to Nationals six times. Be aware that this is something that may happen, and please prepare for it, mentally and financially.

Should your daughter’s team make it to Nationals, you will get far more information about the logistics. Generally, the costs run around \$800-\$1000/person, including flight, hotel, transportation, food, etc. **Each girl MUST be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian – you CANNOT depend on your daughter to be chaperoned by a coach.** So that might run as high as \$2000 per family (one parent/guardian and one cheerleader). This cost assumes that you would share a room with another cheer parent and daughter.

If a team makes it to Nationals, the Wildcats organization will generally do what it can to assist families with the travel expenses. Additionally, the team will fundraise to help offset some costs. We realize that it’s a tough time of year, right before Christmas, to spend that amount of money, but please realize this is THE culmination of the girls’ hard work all fall and we really depend on all the families to be prepared, willing and able to attend. If, for whatever reason, your child would not be able to attend Nationals should the team become eligible to go, please let your coach know no later than mid-August.

We realize this is a lot of information! It will all make sense as the season goes on, and you should feel free to ask questions at any point! The Wildcats is a wonderful organization and we all work to make sure it is a safe and fun experience for all players. Welcome to the Wildcat family!!

West Windsor – Plainsboro Wildcats Cheerleading 2019 TIME AND COMMITMENT AGREEMENT

Cheerleading is a TEAM SPORT that requires personal commitments by both the cheerleader and their parent/guardian. Please read the Agreement, sign and return as confirmation of your understanding and commitment to your child's team.

The 2019 practice/season officially begins Monday, August 5, 2019.

Each cheerleader is expected to attend all practices, games and competitions and to arrive **ON TIME**.

Due to safety considerations, excessive absences may require a change to the cheerleader's role in routines.

Anyone threatening to quit will be dismissed immediately.

Withholding a child from practice should never be used as a form of punishment. You are not only punishing your child, but every other team member, parent and coach on that team.

All competitive squads will participate in the Central Jersey Cheer Competition. Score and placement will determine our advancement in regional cheer competitions.

Please notify the Head Coach, in writing, by August 1st if your child will not attend any cheer competition.

The Head Coach may call additional practices to prepare for competition.

Players with recently pierced ears cannot participate until the earrings can be removed, so please plan accordingly.

We do not recognize any other sport as taking priority over cheerleading from the first day of practice through December 15th. All cheer related obligations will be viewed as a priority over other athletic and/or social activities.

I have read the attached rules and policies for the 2019 season of West Windsor-Plainsboro Wildcats Cheer. I fully understand what is expected of me as a Parent/Guardian of the cheerleader listed below and agree to abide by this policy.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ **Date**_____

Cheerleader Name (Printed) _____

Cheerleader Signature _____