



Alton High to Host Statewide Cheerleading Competition

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - The Alton Community Unit School District #11 cheerleading program will host a statewide invitational competition on Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023, at Alton High School.

Starting at 10 a.m., teams from across Illinois will showcase their cheerleading, tumbling and dancing skills at the Illinois Cheerleading Coaches Association (ICCA) Invitational. Over 20 teams will compete for the chance to go to Springfield in January for the state competition. Megan Hodge, Alton High School's cheerleading coach, invites community members to come out and support the local teams.

“Not a lot of people know about the cheer world, but we’re trying to bring cheer to the community and make it more popular again,” Hodge said. “It’s really cool to watch. Typically, the only people who show up to these competitions are just the cheer community when really, we’d love everyone to come and see and witness how intense of a sport cheer really is, because it truly is a very competitive sport.”

Twenty-one students from Alton Middle School and 32 students from the high school will be competing at the ICCA Invitational. Hodge said the competition will be fierce but fun, with parents and students supporting every team and simply enjoying a day devoted to the sport they love.

“Cheer is in the name. They’re competing against each other, but they just cheer for everyone. It’s awesome to see,” Hodge explained. “Everybody’s there to have fun. These competitions, although all of these athletes are competing against each other, you will notice in the crowd that they still cheer each other on through everything.”

This community support has helped the Alton High School team through “some hurdles” this season, including a few injuries. Hodge said the students, parents and coaching staff are “a family” and her fellow coaches are a “dream team,” which has helped the students succeed and prepared them for the upcoming competition.

She noted that while a lot of people don’t view cheerleading as athletic, she has several great athletes on her team who will showcase their talents during the ICCA Invitational. Students will complete multiple routines that involve tumbling, dancing and ascending. The athleticism makes for an exciting day of competition, Hodge added.

“You really put your body to a full test, and it is very, very physically exhausting, so you have to be extremely conditioned,” she said. “So it’s just incredible to see all of these teams come out and they are just putting their bodies to the test, putting it all out on the floor, working so hard just to showcase what they’ve been working on all year and all of their talents, just to compete against each other to win our state title.”

But while it’s hard work, Hodge said her athletes love what they do. The cheerleading team spends many hours together throughout the school year, from the football and basketball seasons to the competitions and conditioning they complete during the spring. She loves watching them grow as people and athletes, and she is excited to watch their work pay off during Sunday’s competition.

“They love it. They wouldn’t come in and put in those hours if they just didn’t have the love for the sport,” Hodge said. “For them to get recognition, it’s just so important to me as a coach because they deserve it. They come in and they work hard and they have

positive attitudes and they are positive leaders in the community. I just have the best of the best on my team. They're phenomenal kids. I love those kids."

The ICCA Invitational will start at 10 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023 at Alton High School. Admission is \$7 and kids under 3 are free.