

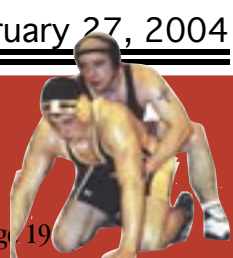
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Cheerleaders qualify for State

By Amber Campbell and Tim Racette

With a struggling season, an unexpected second place finish at the Downers Grove South Competitions qualified the ACHS Varsity Cheerleading Squad for the State Competition on March 16.

In past years, Antioch has been victorious at their regional competitions and has made it to state for the past two years and going 19 out of the last 20. With new juniors on the squad as well as two sophomores, the sport of cheerleading has been given new respect from fans and players.

"This year has been a little more complicated. It's always scary for the seniors to get new juniors on the squad," said senior flyer Kelly Warner. "At first we didn't get along very well, but now we are so close."

As the season progressed, the goal of making it to state started to diminish and squad members started to doubt their strength as a team. Seeing as the girls did not place at the Libertyville and Riverside Brookfield regional competitions, the squad began to think that they would not make it to state.

While judges announced the squads that placed, there was no optimism in the Antioch crowd.

The fourth and third spots had been announced, and Antioch had lost hope of placing at all. When Antioch was announced as second, the girls were extremely shocked and emotional.

"I honestly thought, man that's it. We didn't make it. I thought that if we didn't place in those two spots, then we didn't place," said Christine Shea, senior flyer.

The stakes were high at this competition, since it was the last one that could qualify the squad for state. Most of the seniors felt relieved that they made it, it was also a big confidence booster.

"We were not confident in ourselves going into the competition. Yet, when we placed, it restored our faith in ourselves and brought us together to do our best at state," said Junior base Marleea Bell.

In spite of most of the team having both minor and major injuries, determination and hard practicing by the girls turned around the 2003-04 Varsity Cheerleading season even though countless injuries left some girls, including Warner, unable to compete.

"I hurt my knee earlier in the season at practice and I have to have surgery. So, I'm out, but I'm very proud of girls and even though I wish I was out there at state for the third year in a row," said Warner.

For the juniors on the squad, this is their first experience going state and are all excited for the competition.

"We have never been to state before. Hopefully we are going to make up for that this year," said junior flyer Danielle Davis.

With the loss of past female seniors, came the loss of two specific seniors, their only males Justin Leibolt and Bryan Watson moved the girls out of the coed class.

"We're not [competing] in coed, so we don't have to compete against squads with



Photos by Amber Campbell

At their Qualifying Competition the Sequoits placed second. The team will travel downstate, and try to beat last year's ninth place finish.

guy. I think its better because we never had as many guys as the other squads anyway," said senior flyer Alyson Bruner.

More difficulty has been added as well during the season to make their already solid routine stronger. These changes called for new stunt groups numerous times.

"The momentum and rhythm in stunting wasn't working so I changed the stunt groups to make the stunts more solid," said Robin Gwinn, varsity coach.

As most of the team has been together for three or four years, the bonding and friendships has transformed into passion, which enthusiasm that was very well portrayed out to the audience during the routine.

"This year I feel we have the most talent out of all four years I've been in cheerleading," said Bruner. "Everything is hitting and everybody is working well together."

In order to place in the upper half at state, full squad tumbling is needed. Advanced stunts are required and not dropping is needed. Practice is essential and keeps the girls working to get into shape.

"We are doubling up on cardio conditioning, and upper body strength conditioning. We are cleaning up on tumbling passes (round-off back handspring) for the entire team and stabilizing all stunts. We are going to perform like we own the place." Said coach Gwinn.

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