

INTERNATIONAL CHEER UNION (ICU)



SPECIAL ABILITIES **SPORT OF CHEER RULES** **-CHEERLEADING-** **-PERFORMANCE CHEER-** **2026**

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ICU SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) PERFORMANCE CHEER RULES & GUIDELINES

(For any questions, please email: pc.rules@cheerunion.org)

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ICU SPECIAL ABILITIES - CHEERLEADING RULES

I. ICU SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) CHEERLEADING DIVISIONS GENERAL RULES & CRITERIA

- A. All ICU general rules & guidelines <https://cheerunion.org/education/rules-agegrid/>, mobility/support device rules, as well as routine requirements apply.
- B. Coaches must require proficiency before skill progression and must consider the athlete, group, and team skill levels with regard to proper performance level placement.
- C. All Special Olympics (SO) & Special Abilities (SA) Traditional Teams must be comprised of 100% Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- D. All Special Olympics (SO) Unified Teams must be comprised of a 1:1 ratio of Athletes with and without an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- E. All Special Abilities (SA) Unified Teams must be comprised of 50% or more of Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- F. All Stunts and Pyramids - at prep level or above - will require the spot of a Coach or Assistant for safety purposes. Should the Coach or Assistant assist in the skill, directly or indirectly (for safety reasons), while spotting the skill - a reduced point value will be reflected in the team score for the respective category based on the level of assistance provided.
- G. Tosses are not allowed.
- H. Spotted and assisted tumbling is not allowed in Competition; however, spotted, and assisted tumbling is allowed in Exhibition performances.
- I. Up to three (3) Coach(es) and/or Assistant(s) are allowed to signal from the front of the mat and may not obstruct the view of the judges. Additionally, there is no limit to the number of Assistants around the perimeter of the floor in a squat position.
- J. Assistants shall be dressed in contrasting attire compared to the Athletes, so it is clear to the judges who are the Athletes and who are the Assistants on the floor at any time. For example, Assistants shall wear a dark t-shirt and pants in contrast to the Athletes' lighter colored uniform (or vice versa); however, Assistants may not wear a Cheerleading or Performance Cheer uniform during the routine.
- K. Assistants shall wear athletic shoes (e.g., no flip-flops) and shall not wear any jewelry for the protection of the Athletes.
- L. For Special Olympics (SO)/Special Abilities (SA) Unified Teams Only: Skill difficulty performed by a Unified Partner within a specific category (e.g., tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids, etc.) must not exceed the difficulty of a comparable skill or a skill within the same category performed by an athlete with an intellectual disability, unless an athlete with an intellectual disability is part of the skill (e.g., a partner stunt group, pyramid, etc.), and compliant with the rules detailed herein.
- M. For Special Olympics (SO)/Special Abilities (SA) Divisions Only: Connecting skills (e.g. standing athlete's foot placed on a lunging athlete's thigh or on a nugget skill, etc.) may be recognized as a "Partner Stunt" skill, and any connection of a SO/SA Partner Stunt skill may be recognized as a "Pyramid" on the SO/SA score sheet. Point values allotted are determined on the quality of execution and difficulty performed as is the case in all scoring.
- N. As a potential condition for an athlete with an intellectual disability or neurological symptom, any athlete that may potentially have Atlanto-Axial Instability (AAI) or any physical condition associated with spinal cord compression are strictly prohibited from any skills that may pose a danger to an athlete with AAI or with any physical condition associated with spinal cord compression (including but not limited to forward rolls, backward rolls and any skill that may put an athlete with AAI or any spinal cord compression at risk, etc.). Written approval/clearance by a medical professional and proof of all waivers and documentation prior to physical activity is the direct responsibility of the Team Director and Coach. For Special Olympic teams specifically, additionally - approval/ clearance by a medical professional (via official medical waivers and documentation) must also be cleared and approved by the respective Special Olympics program or by Special Olympics.

II. ICU SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) CHEERLEADING DIVISIONS – BY LEVEL

With the enclosed Special Olympics & Special Abilities (SO/SA) SPECIFIC DIVISION CRITERIA* in place, SO/SA Cheerleading Divisions are available for the following levels (all rules by level can be found within the **ICU Rules Document** at <https://cheerunion.org/education/rules-agegrid/>):

DIVISION LEVEL

- Introductory Level* (Level 0: non-building, non-tumbling)
- Beginner Level* (Level 0.5)
- Novice Level* (Level 1)
- Intermediate Level* (similar to Level 2)

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For any questions or requests for further clarification. Please email cheer.rules@cheerunion.org

III. CHEERLEADING MOBILITY & SUPPORT DEVICE RULES

Note: The use of the term “wheelchair” below also applies to the use of scooters and similar mobility devices, as is applicable.

- All mobility equipment, prosthesis, and braces are considered part of the athlete unless they are removed, in which case they are considered legal props, until replaced on or returned to the athlete.
- Wheelchair users when basing stunts and pyramids must have all wheels in contact with the performance surface during the skill with an added and appropriate anti-tip attachment (or a spotter/bracer with both feet firmly placed on the performance surface with both hands gripped on the 2 back handles stabilizing the wheelchair with both wheels on the performance surface) for safety.
Clarification: For a wheelchair anti-tip attachment to be appropriate, it must be in contact with the chair and the performance surface as an additional point of contact to the performance surface while both wheels of the wheelchair are also in contact with the performance surface.
- Mobility devices (i.e., wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) may be used to aid the top person in loading into a stunt and/or pyramid. Example: A top person may step upon any portion of a wheelchair, mobile device, and/or upon a base supporting a crutch to load into a skill.
- Wheelchair users when topping stunts and pyramids in the wheelchair (or similar apparatus) must use a seatbelt.
- All athletes spotting, catching and/or cradling a skill have mobility through their lower body (with or without use of mobility equipment) to absorb the impact of the skill, as well as with adequate lateral speed to spot, catch and/or cradle the skill.
- All athletes spotting, catching and/or cradling a skill must have at minimum 1 arm extended, not including a prosthetic or other device, beyond the elbow to adequately assist with the skill.
- Release moves and dismounts may be caught by individuals who were not the original base(s) if the main base(s) are not capable of catching and/or cradling the skill.

IV. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For a full listing of the ICU Cheerleading Glossary of Terms (with video and visual examples as well), please see <https://cheerunion.org/cheerleadingglossary/>. For any questions or requests for further clarification. Please email cheer.rules@cheerunion.org

V. SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) ATHLETE QUALIFICATION GUIDELINES

ICU Special Olympics and Special Abilities Divisions are specifically designated for athletes with and without an Intellectual Disability (ID). For each Cheerleading Level, the following qualification requirements apply:

- Special Olympics (SO) Traditional Team: Must be comprised of 100% Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID) AND requires the approval of the team’s respective local Special Olympics programme.
- Special Olympics (SO) Unified Team: Must be comprised of a 1:1 ratio of Athletes with and without an Intellectual Disability (ID) AND requires the approval of the team’s respective local Special Olympics programme.
- Special Abilities (SA) Traditional Team: Must be comprised of 100% Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- Special Abilities (SA) Unified Team: Must be comprised of 50% or more of Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).

VI. SCORESHEETS

To access the ICU SO/SA Scoresheets, please reference <https://cheerunion.org/education/scoresheets/>. For any questions or requests for further clarification. Please email cheer.rules@cheerunion.org

VII. AGE GRID & ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The ICU recommends that all teams consult the specific event athlete age & eligibility requirements where the respective team may compete, as this criterium can differ for different events. For ICU's recommended Age Grid criteria, please reference <https://cheerunion.org/education/rules-agegrid/>.

VIII. OTHER CRITERIA (PERFORMANCE SURFACE DIMENSIONS, ROUTINE TIME, ETC.)

The ICU recommends that all teams consult the specific event criteria (performance surface dimensions, routine time, etc.) where the respective team may compete, as this criterium can differ for different events. For ICU's criteria for ICU events, please reference <https://cheerunion.org/championships/>.

IX. OTHER COMPETITION FORMATS

- A. GAME DAY** is a Cheer competition format that breaks down the elements of Game Cheering into individual segments (in a competitive format, with a pause between each segment) reflective of Game Cheering commonly performed by Cheer Teams at sporting events. All general Safety Rules and applicable level rules apply with added restrictions. Please see <https://cheerunion.org/education/gameday/> for more information.
- B. STUNT** is a Cheer competition formats Cheer skills into an exciting head-to-head game / competition between two teams who execute skills-based routines in various categories – partner stunts, jumps & tumbling, pyramids & tosses, and team routines. All general Safety Rules and applicable level rules apply. Please see <https://stuntthesport.org/> for more information.
- C. URBAN CHEER** is a high energy, rhythmic style of Cheer within the positive traditions in the Urban style. All general Safety Rules and applicable level rules apply.

ICU SPECIAL ABILITIES - PERFORMANCE CHEER RULES

I. ICU SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) PERFORMANCE CHEER DIVISIONS GENERAL RULES & CRITERIA

- A. All Performance Cheer ICU general rules and guidelines <https://cheerunion.org/education/rules-agegrid/>, mobility/support device rules, as well as routine requirements apply.
- B. The use of Service Animals by athletes is permitted. (not allowed in the ICU general rules & guidelines)
- C. All Special Olympics (SO) & Special Abilities (SA) Traditional National Teams must be comprised of 100% Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- D. All Special Olympics (SO) Unified National Teams must be comprised of a 1:1 ratio of athletes with and without an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- E. All Special Abilities (SA) Unified Teams must be comprised of 50% or more of Athletes with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- F. Up to three (3) Coach(es) and/or Assistant(s) are allowed to signal from the front of the mat and may not obstruct the view of the judges. Additionally, there is no limit to the number of Assistants around the perimeter of the floor in a squat position.
- G. Special Olympics (SO)/Special Abilities (SA) teams will follow the Performance Cheer Novice Level for all Genres.
- H. In the Intermediate Level, "Lifts and Partnering" are allowed to be performed independently; however, for Special Olympics (SO) & Special Ability (SA) Teams this is allowed only with a Coach/Assistant as an additional spotter under the designated limitations for the Intermediate level of the respective genre.
- I. Assistants shall be dressed in contrasting attire compared to the Athletes, so it is clear to the judges who are the Athletes and who are the Assistants on the floor at any time. For example, Assistants shall wear a light-colored t-shirt and pants in contrast to the Athletes' darker colored costume/uniform (or vice versa); however, Assistants may not wear a Cheerleading or Performance Cheer costume/ uniform during the routine.
- J. Assistants shall wear athletic/performance style shoes (e.g., no flip-flops) and shall not wear any jewelry for the protection of the Athletes.
- K. Special Olympics (SO) /Special Abilities (SA) Unified Teams Only: Skill difficulty performed by a Unified Partner must not exceed the difficulty of a comparable skill performed by an athlete with an Intellectual Disability (ID).
- L. As a potential condition for an athlete with an intellectual disability or neurological symptom, any athlete that may potentially have Atlanto-Axial Instability (AAI) or any physical condition associated with spinal cord compression are strictly prohibited from any skills that may pose a danger to an athlete with AAI or with any physical condition associated with spinal cord compression (including but not limited to forward rolls, backward rolls and any skill that may put an athlete with AAI or any spinal cord compression at risk, etc.). Written approval/clearance by a medical professional and proof of all waivers and documentation prior to physical activity is the direct responsibility of the Team Director and Coach. For Special Olympic teams specifically, additionally - approval/ clearance by a medical professional (via official medical waivers and documentation) must also be cleared and approved by the respective Special Olympics program or by Special Olympics.

II. ICU SO/SA PERFORMANCE CHEER DIVISIONS - BY GENRE & LEVEL

With the enclosed Special Olympics (SO) & Special Abilities SPECIFIC DIVISION CRITERIA* in place, SO/SA Performance Cheer Divisions are available for the following Genres at the Novice Level (all Rules by Genre & Level can be found within the **ICU Rules Document** at <https://cheerunion.org/education/rules-agegrid/>):

DIVISION GENRE & LEVEL

- POM: Novice Level*
- HIP HOP: Novice Level*
- JAZZ: Novice Level*
- HIGH KICK: Novice Level*

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For any questions or requests for further clarification. Please email pc.rules@cheerunion.org

III. CATEGORY / GENRE DEFINITIONS

POM: Incorporates the use of proper Pom motion technique that is sharp, clean, and precise while allowing for the use of concepts from Jazz, Hip Hop and High Kick. An emphasis is placed on group execution including synchronization, uniformity and spacing. The choreography of a dynamic and effective routine focuses on musicality, staging of visual effects through fluid and creative transitions, levels, and groups, along with complexity of movement and skills. Poms are required to be used throughout the routine. The uniform/costuming should reflect the category style. See score sheet for more information.

HIP HOP: Incorporates authentic street style influenced movements with groove and style. An emphasis is placed on group execution including synchronization, uniformity and spacing. The choreography of a dynamic and effective routine utilizes musicality, staging, complexity of movement and athleticism. Distinctive clothing and accessories reflecting the Hip Hop Culture must be worn. See score sheet for more information.

JAZZ: Incorporates traditional or stylized dynamic movements with strength, continuity, presence, and proper technical execution. An emphasis is placed on group execution including synchronization, uniformity, and spacing. The choreography of a dynamic and effective routine utilizes musicality, staging, complexity of movement and skills. The overall impression of the routine should be lively, energetic, and motivating, with the understanding that the dynamics of movement may change to utilize musicality. The uniform/costuming should reflect the category style. See score sheet for more information.

HIGH KICK (KICK): Incorporates the use of proper high kick technique that includes flexibility, endurance, stamina, upper and lower body strength, placement, and control, while allowing for the use of creative concepts such as staging and skills. High Kicks are required to be used throughout the routine in a purposeful manner and should be the emphasis of routine content. The choreography of a dynamic and effective high kick routine focuses on musicality, staging of visual effects through intervals in kick lines, fluid and creative transitions, levels and groups, along with complexity of movement and athleticism. An emphasis is placed on group execution including synchronization, uniformity, and spacing. The uniform/costuming should reflect the category style. See score sheet for more information.

IV. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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V. PERFORMANCE CHEER MOBILITY & SUPPORT DEVICE RULES

Note: The use of the term "wheelchair" below also applies to the use of scooters and similar mobility devices as is applicable

A. FOR ALL DIVISIONS

1. All mobility equipment, prosthesis, and braces are considered part of the athlete unless they are removed and used to enhance the visual aspect of the performance, in which case they are considered props – and this is not allowed. *However, if any device is removed based on the need for an athlete to perform a skill and the device itself is not used as a prop for the purpose to enhance the visual aspect of the performance, then the device is not considered a prop and is allowed.*
2. Mobility devices (i.e., wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) are allowed within the rules of the division and may be used to support the athlete during the execution of skills.
3. It is the responsibility of the Coach to assure that there are no rocks or other sharp objects lodged in the wheels of the mobility device that could damage the performance surface - prior to the performance.

B. FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS & SPECIAL ABILITIES DIVISIONS ONLY

1. Athletes using non-motorized wheelchairs:
 - a. Must have a minimum of 2 wheels in contact with the performance surface with an added and appropriate anti-tip attachment (or a bracer with both feet firmly placed on the performance surface

with both hands gripped on the 2 back handles stabilizing the wheelchair with both wheels on the performance surface) for safety.

- b. If also basing a skill – without a bracer with both feet firmly placed on the performance surface with both hands gripped on the 2 back handles stabilizing the wheelchair with both wheels on the performance surface - must place the wheels in the lock position.

Clarification For a wheelchair anti-tip attachment to be appropriate, it must be in contact with the chair and the performance surface as an additional point of contact to the performance surface while both wheels of the wheelchair are also in contact with the performance surface.

2. Athletes using motorized wheelchairs must have all wheels on the performance surface at all times.
3. An athlete may be lifted out of a wheelchair; however, the wheelchair may not be lifted from the performance surface.
4. Once an athlete in a wheelchair is in motion the Coach(es)/Team Manager(s) must remain with the athlete until the wheelchair has stopped. *Clarification: Athletes in a wheelchair that require assistance to initiate movement cannot be pushed and released.*

VI. SPECIAL OLYMPICS (SO) & SPECIAL ABILITIES (SA) ATHLETE QUALIFICATION GUIDELINES

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VII. SCORESHEETS

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VIII. AGE GRID & ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

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IX. OTHER CRITERIA (PERFORMANCE SURFACE DIMENSIONS, ROUTINE TIME, ETC.)

The ICU recommends that all teams consult the specific event criteria (performance surface dimensions, routine time, etc.) where the respective team may compete, as this criterium can differ for different events. For ICU's criteria for ICU events, please reference <https://cheerunion.org/championships/>.

X. OTHER COMPETITION FORMATS - GAME DAY

GAME DAY is a competition format that breaks down the elements of Game Cheering into individual segments (in a competitive format, with a pause between each segment) reflective of Game Cheering commonly performed by Performance Cheer Teams at sporting events. All general Safety Rules and applicable level rules apply with added restrictions. Please see <https://cheerunion.org/education/gameday/> for more information.