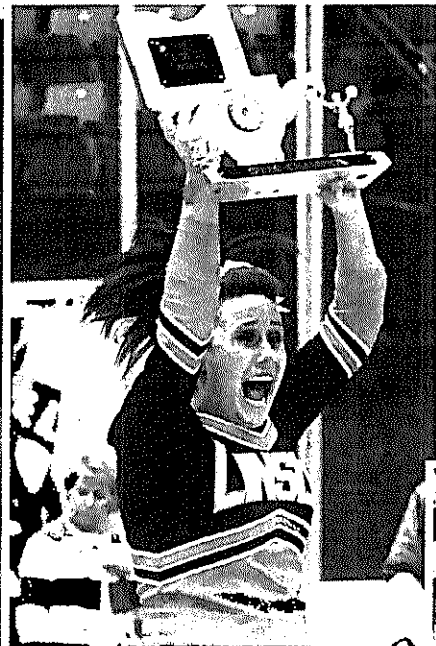


2015 OVAC

# CHEERING

## Championships

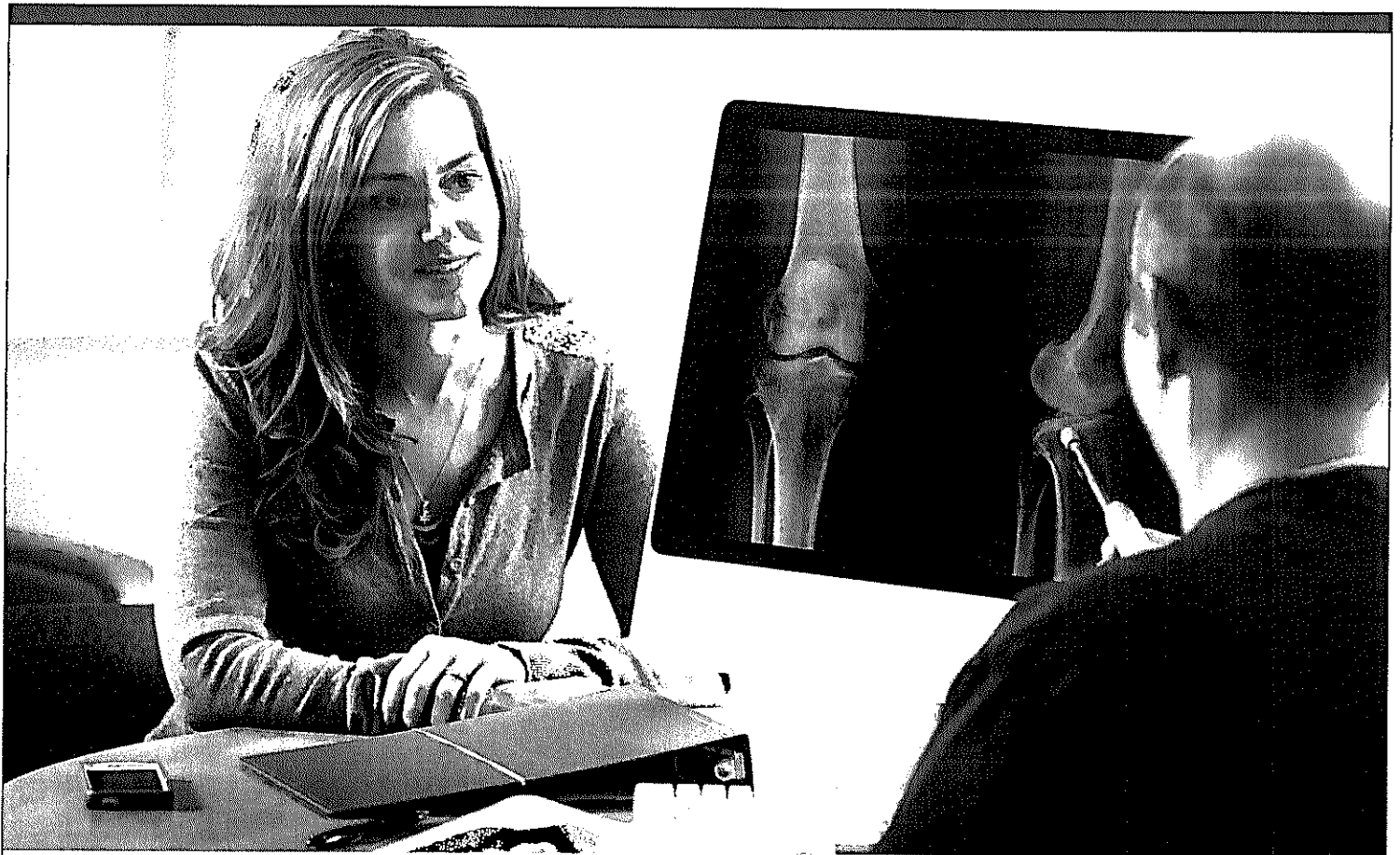
Saturday, February 7, 2015



*The Intelligencer.*

Wheeling News-Register

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## *Are you ready for some ... cheerleading?*

As our publication today highlights, the pom-poms will be flying and squads will be tumbling this weekend as more than 350 high school cheerleaders, representing 29 high schools from 12 Ohio and West Virginia counties, participate in the 24th annual Ohio Valley Athletic Conference Cheering Championships.

The WesBanco Arena doors open early, and the competition will continue throughout the day.

A total of 29 teams are participating this year, and each is highlighted inside the publication. They are, by division:

**1A — Beallsville, Bishop Donahue, Conotton Valley, Weirton Madonna, Paden City, St. John Central.**

**2A — Barnesville, Bridgeport, Cameron, Clay-Battelle, Shadyside, Toronto, Wheeling Central.**

**3A — Bellaire, The Linsly School, Magnolia, Monroe Central, River, Tyler Consolidated.**

**4A — Harrison Central, Martins Ferry, Oak Glen, St. Clairsville.**

**5A — Indian Creek, John Marshall, Parkersburg South, Steubenville, Weir, Wheeling Park.**

Last year's champions were Bishop Donahue, Class 1A; Wheeling Central, 2A; The Linsly School, 3A; St. Clairsville, 4A; and Wheeling Park, 5A.

## 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Saturday, Feb. 7,  
WesBanco Arena

Doors open at 8:30 a.m.,  
warm-ups at 9:30 a.m.

29 teams in five  
divisions compete  
for this year's crown

### **Barnesville Shamrocks** Head coach: Kayla Landefeld

Last year, Barnesville High School finished fifth in their division at the OVAC Cheering Championships. And that's OK, according to head coach Kayla Landefeld.

"Just making improvements every year is more important to us than where we finish," she said. "We always try to emphasize to them to just go out there and have fun with it and to not be so hard on themselves. Cheering has gotten too serious in some aspects."

This year's OVAC Championships will be their first and possibly only competition of the year. In recent years the squad has focused mainly on cheering at games, Landefeld said, though she has considered branching out this year and competing more.

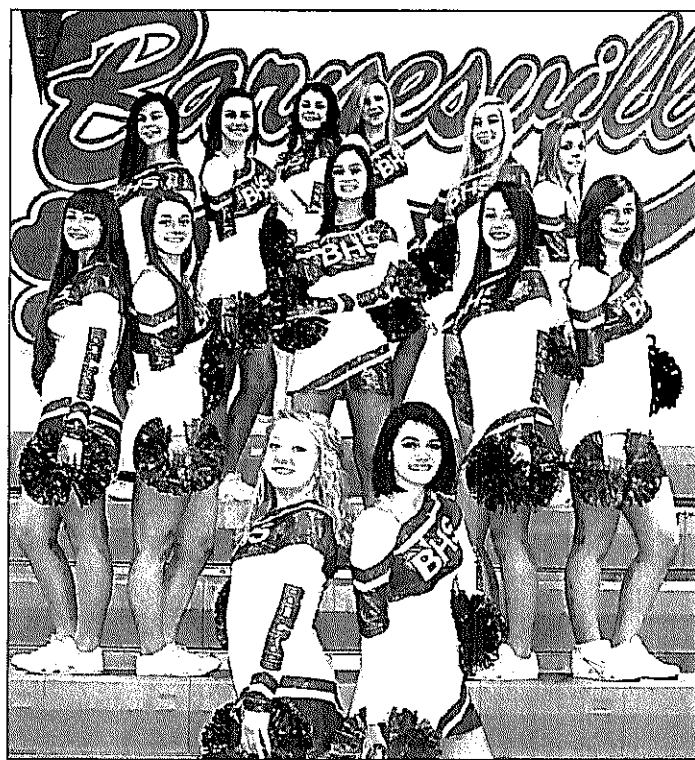
Landefeld and assistant coach Katy Clumly will take a team of 14 girls to this year's OVACs, including senior Lauren Robinson; juniors Lauren Ebeling and Ella Carpenter; sophomores Jenna Grear, Emmy Carpenter,

Brianna Leach, Ashley Brown, Sydney Baum; and freshmen Kiley Cirola, Morgan Burghy, Hannah Burkhart, Ashley Nelson, Jennifer Farson and Cara Singleton.

"We usually start in June and go all summer and finish up in February," Landefeld said. "During football we're practicing a couple days a week. And once basketball season hits, that jumps up to five days a week at least. Practice on a normal day is two to three hours. Or if we're learning new stuff it can go up to six hours. The girls will get a little tired on those days."

As per Ohio rules, Landefeld is allowed to combine her varsity and junior varsity squads to create a competition squad. And this year she's done just that. Combining two squads can be a challenge, she said, but they've come together well.

"It's very funky," she said of this year's routine. "We wanted to go out this year and



have the whole routine be a 'wow' factor and be fun and different from anything we've done in the past. It's definitely fun and something you want to dance to."

Landefeld started cheering in middle school and for Barnesville High School, graduating in 2005. She got back into coaching six years ago and hasn't looked back.

# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Beallsville Blue Devils Head coach: Tami Neiswonger

Beallsville High School's cheering squad is looking to make its mark at this year's OVAC Cheering Championships.

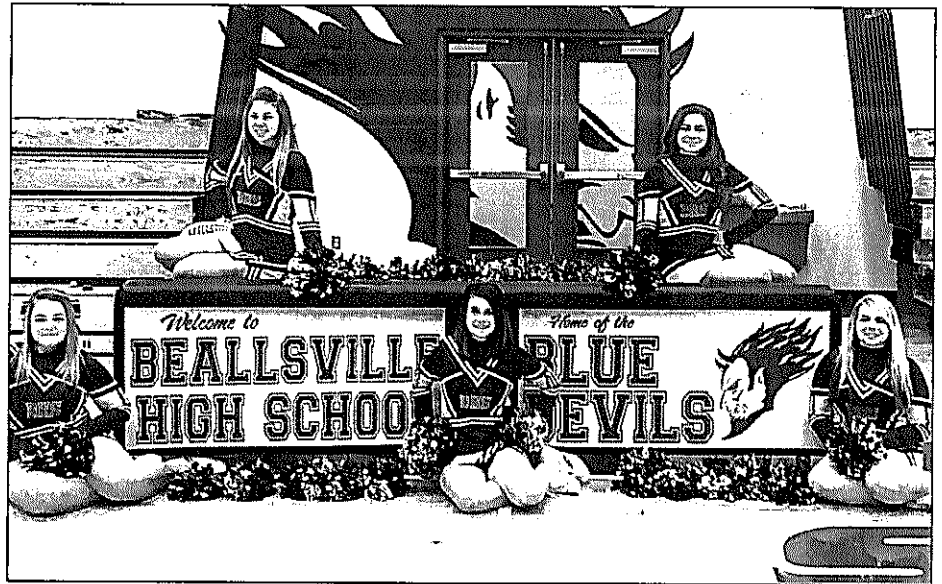
"We're always the underdogs," said coach Tami Neiswonger. "We only have one tumbler and I think that really hurts us at a competition like OVACs."

To make up for the lack of tumbling, Neiswonger said her squad is working on a unique routine for this year's event that highlights each of the girls' strengths, with a focus more on the cheering and dance. Her daughter, junior Madison Neiswonger, is the only tumbler and will do what she can.

"Yes, it makes it hard with only one girl tumbling," she said. "But they're very determined. I've seen a lot of enthusiasm from my squad this year."

Rounding out the team are senior Hannah Perkins and juniors Ashley Yingling, Kylee Holland and Myranda Thomas. The OVAC Championships will be their first competition, followed shortly thereafter by the OASSA Regionals being held in St. Clairsville on Feb. 15.

"Basically we do four days a week of practice," Neiswonger said. "Tuesdays and Fridays are two-hour practices. And Thursdays and weekends are about three hours



each. And we practice before games, as well. Tryouts are held in March each year. They get April off. We get started in May and we practice all summer going into football. So cheerleading for us is pretty much a year-round thing."

The reason they start in May, she said, is that her squad offers a clinic for local students ages 3-12. For one week the cheerleaders will teach participants cheers, chants and basic tumbling.

Despite their small numbers, Beallsville

has high hopes for this year's OVAC Championships, where they will compete in the 1A division.

"It's more of a traditional cheer routine," Neiswonger said. "We have our cheer mixed in with a little tumbling."

The girls have "cheered together since they were in the third grade," Neiswonger said. "They're determined to go out and say, 'We're capable! We can do this!' They've got the school spirit and they want to represent Beallsville well."

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Bellaire Big Reds Head coach: Amy Games

Last year's third-place finish in the 3A category at the OVAC Cheering Championships was Bellaire High School's best finish since 1996, said head coach Amy Games. Much of that squad will be back this year and they're the hardest-working, most talented group of girls she's worked with in her six years of coaching.

"It's essentially the same squad as last year minus my senior leaders," Games said. "But what makes them special is that they're so young. Ninety percent of the squad are sophomores. ... They're young but they look like seniors who have been doing this for years."

The Bellaire squad consists of juniors Kaitlyn Callarik, Markiah Peltz, Taylor Scott, Kaisha Violet; sophomores Shaye Beckett, Makenna Berka, Ashlie Conner, Khiah Kimbro, Megan McCarthy, Sailor Myers, Rylie Purtiman; and freshmen Hannah D'Aquila and Dawnell Ticarich.

"Starting in June they're practicing three to four days a week, two hours a day," Games said. "And that's all summer long. And then when the school year starts they probably practice five days a week for two hours. And then when it's OVAC season we have a lot of four-hour Saturday and Sunday practices. Weekends are when we work with our choreographer."

The Bellaire competition squad is untested this year as the OVAC Cheering Championships will be their first competition. Games is confident in the routine.

"This year's routine is very fast," she said. "What you call the 'cheering count' is very fast. There are quicker motions, which are very difficult for the girls to do. And the first part of



the routine is nothing but tumbling. ... Bellaire has not been known for tumbling in the past."

The new dance studio in Bellaire — Turn It Out Dance Academy — has been a big

help for the team, she said.

"I have a girl who's a junior now who when I got her couldn't tumble at all," Games said. "Now she's doing a 'whip pass,' which is a very difficult move."



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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Bishop Donahue Blshops Head coach: Dana Mele

Only a few more points at the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships in Parkersburg this past November and Bishop Donahue would have moved on to states. They came in third place. But head coach Dana Mele said they did great.

"I was happy with the performance they gave that day," she said. "But cheering is a very subjective sport."

Mele runs her competition squad with the help of assistant coach Aleigha Hissam and the two came up with an OVAC title last year in the 1A division. And they're hungry for another win.

"For a single A school, we truly have the talent," she said. "Our girls are very dedicated. They practice six days a week from August through February. They maintain that practice schedule until the day of OVACs. It's a very long season so they have to have dedication. These girls truly love cheering."

This year's Bishop Donahue squad consists of seniors Adriana Theiss and Hanna Little; juniors Abbey Mele, Sommer South and Shelby Davis; and sophomores Jen Richmond, Josie Bonar, Elizabeth Smith,



Megan Stout, Maddie Kellar, Sophia Gretchen, Melissa O'Kelley and Caroline Brannan.

The core of Bishop's success, Mele said, is tumbling.

"All those years of taking lessons has paid off and now they're up in front of a couple hundred people and able to show off their abilities," she said. "They'll go out during games and hold a 'tumble off' where one girl will do a certain thing and the next girl will copy it and add on. They

like to showcase their abilities."

What else is exceptional about her squad, Mele said, is that every one of her 13 girls has a 3.8 GPA or higher. It's "an extreme group of girls," she said.

This year marks Mele's fifth year of coaching. She cheered in high school for Wheeling Central Catholic. When two of her three daughters got involved in the sport, it drew her back in. She said she particularly enjoys the bonding aspect of competition cheerleading.

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Bridgeport Bulldogs Head coach: Erika Harvey

"It's unlike any other competition," Bridgeport Cheering Coach Erika Harvey said of the OVAC Cheering Championships. "Because the schools know each other and they know what to expect of the other squads in terms of competitiveness. They're competing against one another, yet cheering for each other at the same time."

At 24 years old, Harvey is one of the youngest head coaches leading a team at this championships. This year's OVACs will be her first as head coach of Bridgeport. Last year Bridgeport finished fifth in 2A. Yet she's confident in her ability and the ability of her squad moving into February — partly from her different take on what constitutes practice.

"I tell them that cheering for games is practice for competition," she said. "They're practicing their motions, stiffness, voices, jumps and tumbling. And I



think with a lot of schools, they don't see football and basketball cheering in that light. And I feel like if they did, a lot of schools would improve a lot more."

This year's Bridgeport squad consists of seniors Abby Gresham, Shannon Frey and

Mikaya Green; juniors Kyle Lindsey and Lexie Willoughby; and freshmen Julia Starkey, Zetra Foster and Maryjane Williams.

That's right — Kyle. Bridgeport has a male on its roster. And it's worked out fabulously so far, according to Harvey.

"He definitely makes things more interesting. He takes corrections and learns from them.

"He's been wonderful. I've told him that he needs to make sure he's on point, because people are going to be looking at him because he's a boy. He knew he had a lot to prove at the beginning of the season and he's surprised a lot of people," she said.

So far this year Bridgeport has competed at "Cheer for a Cure," held at Buckeye Local High School.

They came in second to Toronto High School. But, as Harvey pointed out, it was mainly about getting the team some competition experience and doing something for a good cause.

Doing the right thing is something that Harvey hopes to instill in her squad.

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Cameron Dragons Head coach: Mandi Chaplin

Cameron High School has been moved up to 2A for this year's OVAC Cheering Championships. Head coach Mandi Chaplin said that makes them the smallest school competing at that level.

"This year we're competing against schools we don't normally compete against," she said. "Schools like Shadyside, Bridgeport and Toronto. I've lost several girls to basketball season — we're down to seven from 13 — so it's going to be difficult."

Last year was Chaplin's first OVAC championships as Cameron's head coach, and her squad finished fifth. She said she was amazed by the talent of the other squads and came to realize that the event is predominantly a tumbling competition.

"I told my girls that they had to step up their game," she said. "There are a lot of schools that have full-squad tumbling. And that's hard to compete with. ... That's talent. And it's tough to compete with."

Cameron's squad is not without its own talent. They go into this year's championships with seniors Caitlyn Berardi and Shelby McCracken; juniors

Maddie Ross, Cara Martin and Alexis Booth; sophomores Ashley Ruza and Julia Yocum; and freshman Sarah Norris.

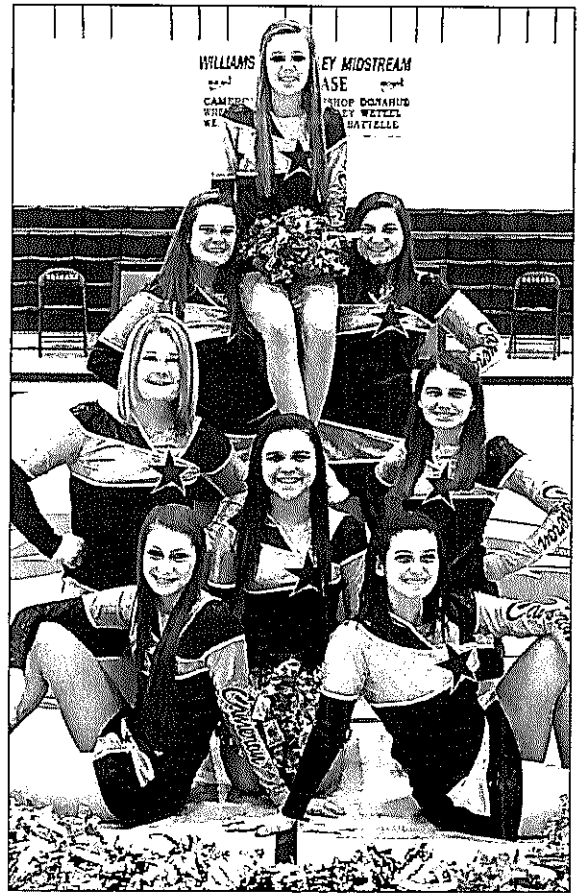
The girls began practice in August and their season goes until March. They're practicing four to five days a week.

Because of their numbers, Chaplin said she wants the focus at this year's championships to be full-squad tumbling. And that means synchronizing tumbling passes and having more than one girl doing roundoff hand-springs at the same time.

"We talked about this early this year," she said. "And I asked them what they wanted to focus on this year. And they all said they wanted to be more competitive in tumbling."

One of the girls on Chaplin's squad — Maddie Ross — briefly held the Guinness World Record for standing back handsprings at a high school football game. It was short-lived, but really exciting, Chaplin said.

As of their routine, Chaplin said it's "fun, the music is fun and it's upbeat. There's a very high energy level."



## Clay-Battelle Gee Bees Head coach: Barb Neely

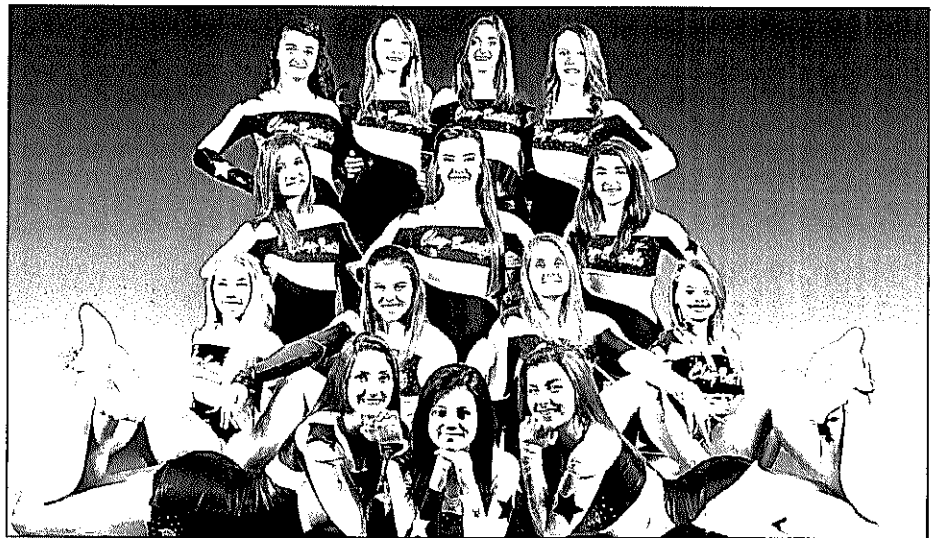
On Dec. 13, Clay-Battelle High School won its 11th state cheering title in Charleston. The 12-girl squad rolls into OVACs this month as the state's reigning 1A champions.

"It was awesome," head coach Barb Neely said of the experience. "Our team has a very strong bond. It's almost like we're a family. But we're definitely one team. This year's theme has been, 'One team, one dream.' And of course our dream was to go to the state championships. So now our dream is to make it to OVACs and maybe get a championship there."

Some things will be different at OVACs. The Clay-Battelle squad will be competing at the 2A level, going against schools such as Bridgeport and Shadyside. And then of course there will be no stunting or mounting allowed, to accommodate the Ohio schools. They feel they're up to the challenge, however.

"We're doing a fun tumbling, dance and pom routine," Neely said. "And it's going to highlight our strengths of personality, showmanship on the floor, tumbling skills and our dancing. Plus our actual cheer is very strong and was very well-liked at the state competition."

This year's squad includes seniors



Fontana Eddy, Faithlynn Walker and Brittany Kuhn; juniors Braelynn Neely, Alyssa Ruth and Chloe Corder; sophomores Merideth Barr, Brooke Barr, Emily Owens, Hailey Hall and Morgan Darling; and freshman Faith Stewart.

Neely coaches alongside assistant Nikki Mattingly and volunteer assistant Danielle Barner. Though she didn't cheer in high school, she has a strong dance background and was a competitive baton twirler. She owned a dance studio for 23 years where she taught dance and gymnastics.

"We're working really hard to win OVACs," Neely said of her Monongalia County squad. "These girls spend so many hours together. Some days you spend more time with your cheer family than your outside family."

Last year was Clay-Battelle's first appearance at the OVAC Cheering Championships and they placed runner-up behind Wheeling Central. Because of the lack of stunting and mounting, Neely said that the event is relaxing and enjoyable for her girls.



# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Conotton Valley Rockets Head coach: Janelle Cline

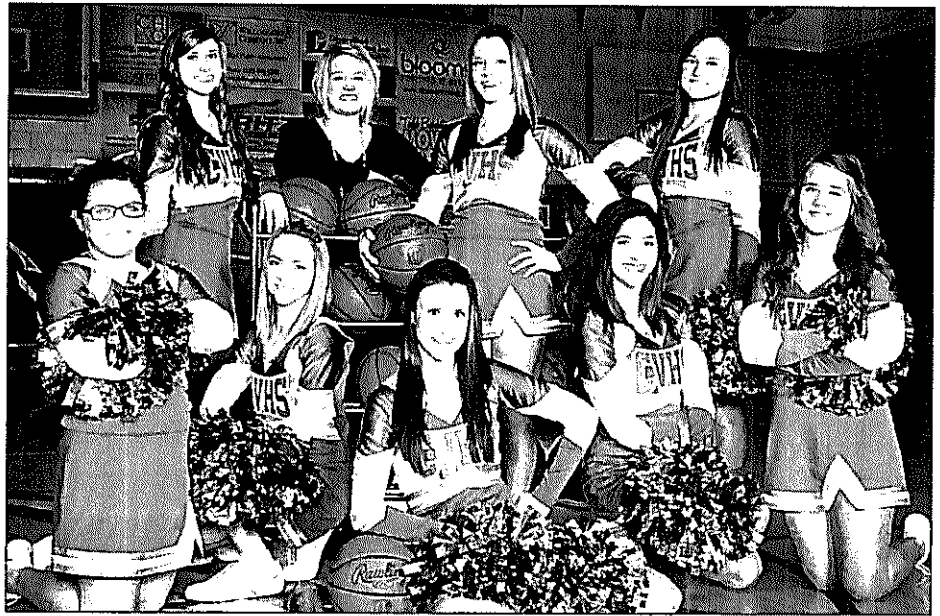
For Conotton Valley head coach Janelle Cline, cheerleading is about getting back to the basics.

"If someone comes up and asks me what's a cheerleader, the definition for me is that every Friday night they're out under the lights cheering on the boys they've known since elementary school. So many schools focus strictly on competitions. And to me competitions are just an added bonus to show off how good your squad is," she said.

That said, the OVAC Cheering Championships is the focus of the Rockets' competition squad. Last year they placed fifth in the 1A division.

"I want them to get into the top three this year," she said. "We only have two girls that tumble. So that's what we're facing. Some teams have every girl on their squad tumbling. But cheering isn't just about tumbling. It's about spirit and actually being a cheerleader."

This year's squad is without senior leadership, and consists of juniors Mikaela Manbeck and Michaela Westfall; sophomores Brooke Reichman, Tanika Yosick, Montse Quijano and Madison Lyon; and



freshmen Skylar Mauge and Jennifer Sizemore.

The Conotton Valley season starts in August and goes through this month. Prior to OVACs the girls are practicing three days a week for three hours a day.

Cline cheered for neighboring Indian Valley High School.

"This is my passion," she said of coaching cheering. "I make sure that I don't repeat all the things that I didn't like about

cheering when I was in school. I don't want that to happen to these girls."

She said the OVAC routine will be fun and fresh with contemporary hit songs. There will be an emphasis on jumps rather than tumbling. And the squad will perform pikes and double toe touches.

"This one is a lot faster and with more movement than past routines," Cline said. "The crowd will get into it. I'm excited about the routine this year."

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Harrison Central Huskies

**Head coach: Terra Frye**

When Terra Frye stepped in as head cheering coach at Harrison Central High School halfway through the season, she knew she had her work cut out for her.

"I walked onto the job between football and basketball seasons after the old coach quit," she said. "And it was all rush, rush. It was just a mess. And I'm just trying to do what I can with it. But we're making it. And they're doing well."

Practice, practice, practice is Frye's mantra. She said that since she's come onto the scene her squad is practicing four to five days a week, averaging about two hours per practice. That's a big bump up from what they'd been doing before.

"We don't have a whole lot of tumbling," she said. "There are two girls on our injured list who are out of commission for tumbling. But as long as they enjoy the dance, that's all that matters to me. The routine is more dance-oriented. They put their hearts into it and you can tell."

This year's Harrison Central squad includes seniors Madeena Piergallini and Vanessa Moyer; junior Karli Ray; sophomores Bailie Ray and Alex Williamson; and freshmen Paige Pruneski, Reanne



Brooks and Kali Carter. Volunteer assistants are Cindy Elliott and Jenny Thomas.

Frye has 14 years of coaching experience and is a certified level-five tumbling instructor, and she has her cheer judging certification through the state of West Virginia.

Right now, she says, her focus is building confidence in her girls.

"We really need to get some wins," she said. "If we practice, practice, practice. I think everything will come along. I'd like a

top-four or top-five finish at OVACs this year. But it's not so much aiming high as it is simply stepping up our game every year. I have a lot of dedicated girls who are there and working hard."

Harrison Central will compete along with other 4A schools at the OVAC Cheering Championships. And no matter where they place, Frye said she'll be proud of them.

"As long as they do their best and put their hearts into it," she said.

## Indian Creek Redskins

**Head coach:  
Gina Giuliani**

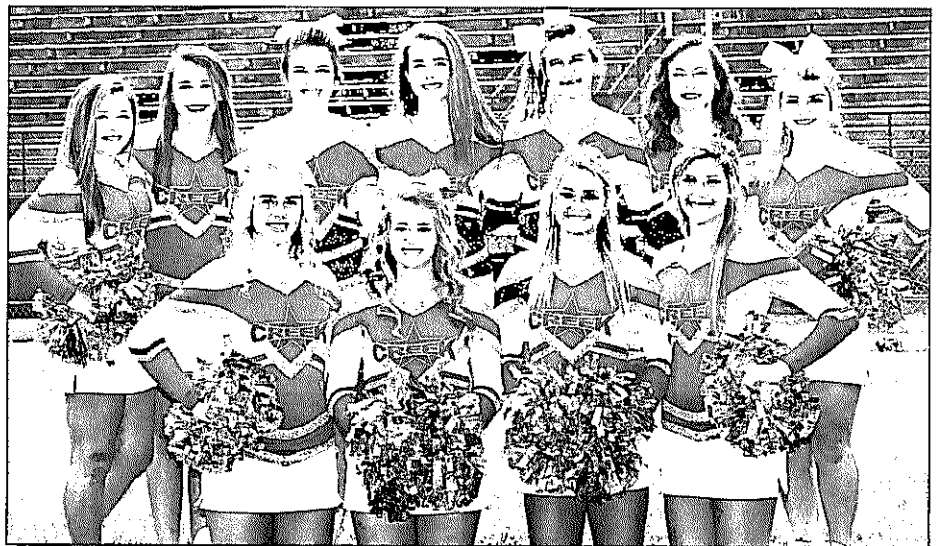
Seven freshmen and four seniors makes for an interesting dynamic on the Indian Creek High School cheerleading squad.

"It's hilarious," said head coach Gina Giuliani. "We'll have pool parties and sleepovers and lots of bonding activities. The bonding aspect of it is important because they all depend on one another out there on the floor. The four older girls have taken on big sister roles. And they're really helping these younger girls."

The members of this year's squad are Emily Crossley, Maddie Billick, Maddie Rees, Brooke Spence, Shayna Davis, Kelsey Lewis, Marlana Rees, Miah Thompson, Jessica Shimon, Addy Trice and Julia Holman. Giuliani coaches alongside assistant Lisa Fithen.

Giuliani cheered during her high school years at Steubenville Catholic Central High School and a year at the University of Akron. She's been head coach of Indian Creek for the past three years, and is excited about her team's prospects in 2015.

"So far this year we've only competed at the Jefferson County Fair," Giuliani said. "OVACs will be the second competition this year. And I'll be honest with you, my girls work harder and train more to get



ready for the fair. More of our rivals are there as opposed to OVACs. They're not very familiar with Wheeling Park or Brooke."

Giuliani said that Indian Creek came in third at last year's OVAC Cheering Championships. The team competes in the 5A division.

"It's always hard competing against West Virginia schools because cheerleading is held to different standards there," she said. "We just go out there and focus on ourselves."

Indian Creek holds its cheering tryouts in May and practices through June and July. The competition squad takes off the months of September and October. Practice picks back up prior to OVACs and continues through February. Practice is generally held two days a week at three hours apiece.

"There is a strong opening," Giuliani said of this year's OVAC routine. "Joey Takacs is our choreographer and we've got some really good choreographed dancing in the second half. It's fun to watch."

# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

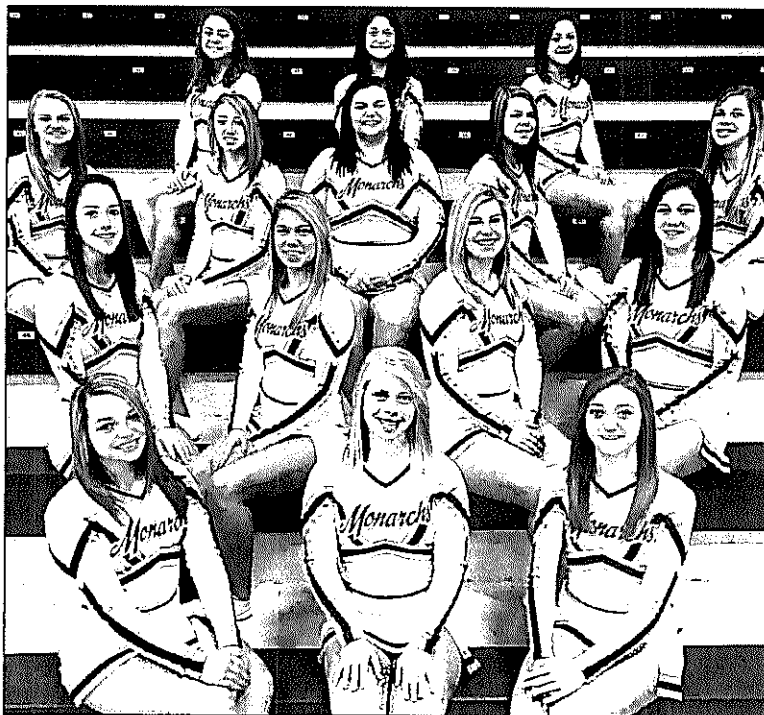
## John Marshall Monarchs Head coach: Marcie Robbins

All three of John Marshall High School's cheerleading coaches — head coach Marcie Robbins, assistant coach Dee Williams and junior varsity coach Anna Kelly — work at the school, which makes it nice for squad members when they want to stop by and seek out help.

"We're a close-knit group," Robbins said. "All three of us are around the school building every day. I talk to other coaches who don't work for the schools they coach for. Many of them comment on how nice it must be for us to be around and accessible to the girls during the day. And it is."

So far this year the Monarchs have competed at the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships in Parkersburg. They placed eighth.

"The girls struggled with mounting,"



she said, "Our stunts just didn't hit that day. And that's important for regionals in West Virginia."

This year's squad consists of seniors Courtney Hanket and Taylor Beegle; juniors Maddy Fisher, Rachel Beaton and Carli Whorton; sophomores Kaytlin

Shockey, Emily Yoho, Abbey Bauer, Katie Whorton, Zoey Wills, Haley Stevey, Alex Huggins and Jourdin Yuncke; and freshmen Charlee Dunn and Lauren Bonar.

John Marshall finished second at last year's OVACs. They compete in the 5A division. They practice as much as they can to stay competitive.

"When we get ready for regionals in November," Robbins said, "football is going on at the same time. So there is a game one day and then we practice five additional days per week. After regionals, when we're getting ready for OVACs, there's often more than one basketball game per week. We fill in the rest with practice so six days a week we're cheering or in practice."

"We have 12 returning girls," Robbins said. "And they're very determined to work hard. We've received runner-up three out of the last four years. With so many girls returning they're very motivated to win this year."



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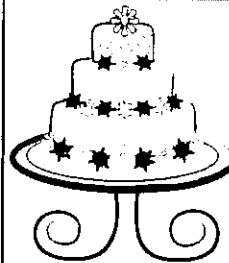
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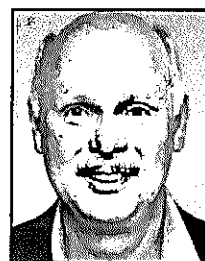
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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Linsly Cadets

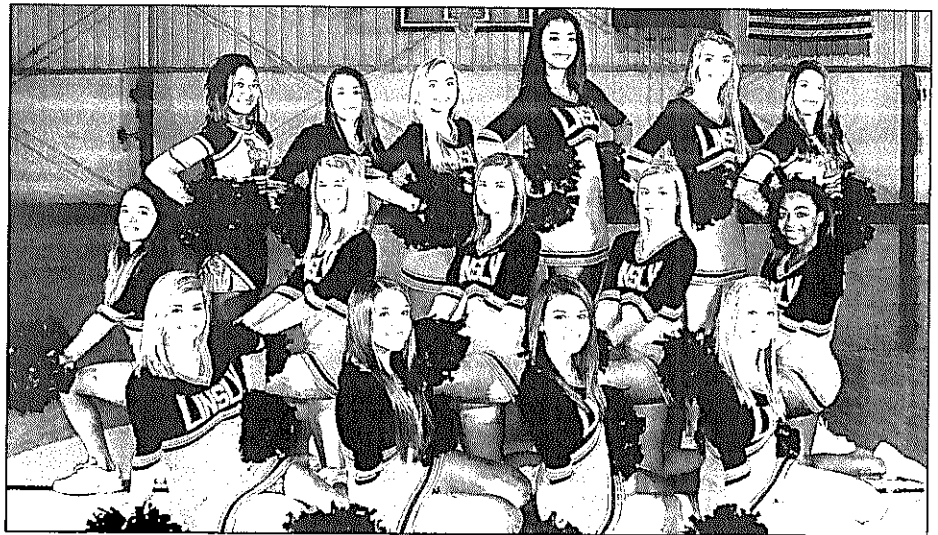
### Head coach: Megan Caruso

The OVAC Cheering Championships is the focus of The Linsly School's competition squad, as the private school is not eligible for many contests on either side of the river. This singular focus won them last year's 3A title.

"We've won OVACs four times in the past five years," head coach Megan Caruso said. "And that has attracted dedicated girls who want to build this program into a dynasty that people can remember. We don't have a lower school cheering program. So the younger girls at Linsly see how well the high school girls have done and work harder at a younger age to make the OVAC squad."

Caruso is the only coach and her squad consists of seniors Skylar Page, Carina Pinkston, Savannah Harden and Kylie Small; juniors Lexi Hirt, Hannah Stanley and Dejour Jackson; sophomores Kaitlyn Schau, Braedyn West, Gwen Mirsoyan and Jennifer Orban; and freshmen Gabby Harden, Alexis Storch, Lydia Anglinger and Husia Ma'at.

While they start conditioning in June, the Linsly cheerleading season officially begins in August. It runs through football season and OVACs to the end of basketball in either February or March.



Caruso's squad practices six days a week for two to three hours per practice. And despite being a West Virginia school, they focus on tumbling because they are not eligible for local competitions featuring mounting.

"They are a really dedicated, fun and smart group of girls," said Caruso. "It's a young squad. I thought it was going to be a rebuilding year. But they're better than ever. Talented, young and dedicated."

Caruso said this is her sixth season of coaching. A Weirton native and Weir High

School graduate, she's been coaching Linsly since she moved to Wheeling. She enjoys her position, and she's particularly impressed with her girls' drive to give back to the community.

"They raised \$1,500 for Relay for Life, they read to kids at local elementary schools, they did a T-shirt drive for breast cancer awareness.

"They just want to help out. They feel some sort of desire to help out the less fortunate and be a role model to young kids growing up."

## Magnolia Blue Eagles

### Head coach: Jennifer Eller

Magnolia High School cheerleading is looking for redemption after a less-than-desirable finish at the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships in Parkersburg in November.

"It was a disappointing performance," said assistant coach Marcie Cline. "There were some injuries."

Now their eyes are on the OVAC Cheering Championships, where Magnolia will compete as a 3A school. With the girls' previous injuries now resolved, the squad is going into the competition healthy, Cline said.

She's especially excited about this year's routine.

"It's fast-paced with a lot of gymnastics. We had a good choreographer — Zach Maure — come in to help us," she said.

This year's squad consists of seniors Hannah Eller, Kelsey Newman and Angela Sizemore; juniors Savanna Bates, Lexi Cartwright, Kylie Cozart, Sydney Hale, Danielle Stewart and Kayla Ware; sophomores Camryn Clegg and Alayna Cline; and freshmen Kara Boggs, Kayla Stewart and Mackenzie Wade.

"I think they're really hard workers," Cline said. "And I really think they have



that drive to become better. And that's their goal right now. ... They take criticism well and to me that's a sign of maturity."

Cline said high school sports is the main focus in New Martinsville, and she's asking for community support as the cheerleaders head to Wheeling this month.

"Our cheerleaders are represented at pretty much everything," she said. "Not just boys and girls sporting events."

Cheering season starts at Magnolia in June for two weeks and really heats up in August. It goes until the boys finish their

basketball season, usually in the middle of March. They practice four days a week for two hours a day, Cline said.

Cline is a former head coach of Magnolia cheering who's getting involved again after a hiatus of many years.

She cheered at Paden City High School and finds working as a coach to be equally rewarding.

"It helps me stay patient," she said. "And as a mom it helps me to see the teenage side of things. It's a unique window into the lives of these girls."



# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Martins Ferry Purple Riders

**Head coach: Cathy Reuther**

Martins Ferry cheerleading Coach Cathy Reuther said her squad works hard 10 months of the year, and "it would be nice to have the community come out and support them one day out of the year" at this month's OVAC championships.

Her girls do many things throughout the year supporting the football and basketball players, she said. Surely the 11 girls on this year's competition squad would welcome any support at the championships, where the squad competes as a 4A school.

"We finished third last year and of course I wasn't happy with that," Reuther said. "This year we're focusing on the sharpness and the cleanliness of our routine. We're down in terms of tumbling. So we've been practicing as many days throughout the week as we can get gym time."

This year's Purple Riders squad consists of seniors Krissy Hotlosz and Makayla Jamison; juniors Jenn Reuther, Mackenzie Reeb and Cassie Berisford; sophomores Kaitlen Hood, Megan Edwards, Carly McKeegan, Zoe Marling and Peightyn Bumbico; and freshman Sami Eimer.

Reuther said the two seniors on her squad — Hotlosz and Jamison — have stepped up in terms of taking on leadership



roles. She's particularly excited for this year's routine.

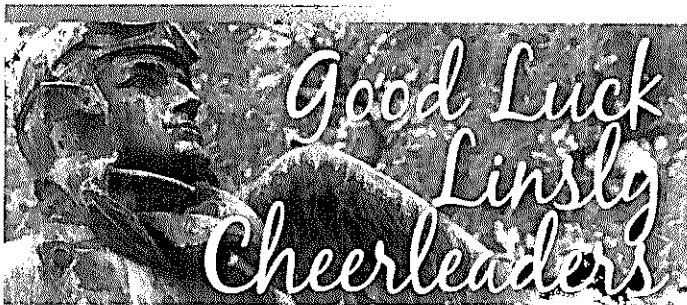
"My favorite part is the pom routine at the end," she said.

"And we've been working all year long to improve our tumbling routine. It's one of our weaker points this year. So we're compensating for that by working on the tightness of our motions in our performance. Honestly there are some people out there who think tumbling is everything. But it's really not. You have to have the

whole package."

Reuther didn't cheer in high school, but was drawn into the sport through Young Buckeyes. Her son played in the league and her daughter cheered as well. They needed a coach so she started there, picking things up along the way. She's been head coach of Martins Ferry for four years now.

One of the things she's most proud of is her squad's "Kiddie Camp," hosted the third week of every June.



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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Monroe Central Seminoles Head coach: Brooke McVey

Though her squad is small in size, they're big in heart.

Monroe Central High School Cheerleading Head Coach Brooke McVey said the 3A school features only six girls who will travel to the OVAC Cheering Championships this month. The championships will be a first for McVey, who is in her first year on the job.

"I like being coach a lot, but it can be stressful," she said.

McVey and assistant coach Liz Schuerman lead a team composed of seniors Victoria Price and Veronica Vernon; junior Alli Wilcox; sophomore Leslie Lohr; and freshmen Bre Antill and Kendall Lydick.

The squad usually practices between 10 and 12 hours a week, McVey said, with those hours divided up between two to three practices. The season begins with tryouts in March, and even though she gives her girls two months off in total, she considers it to be a year-round commitment.

"It doesn't really end," she said.

McVey cheered for Bellaire High School and at West Liberty University, where she got to cheer for the men's basketball team during their 2011 Division II Final Four appearance. She also spends

time helping judge cheering tryouts around the Ohio Valley at schools like Shadyside High School and Barnesville High School.

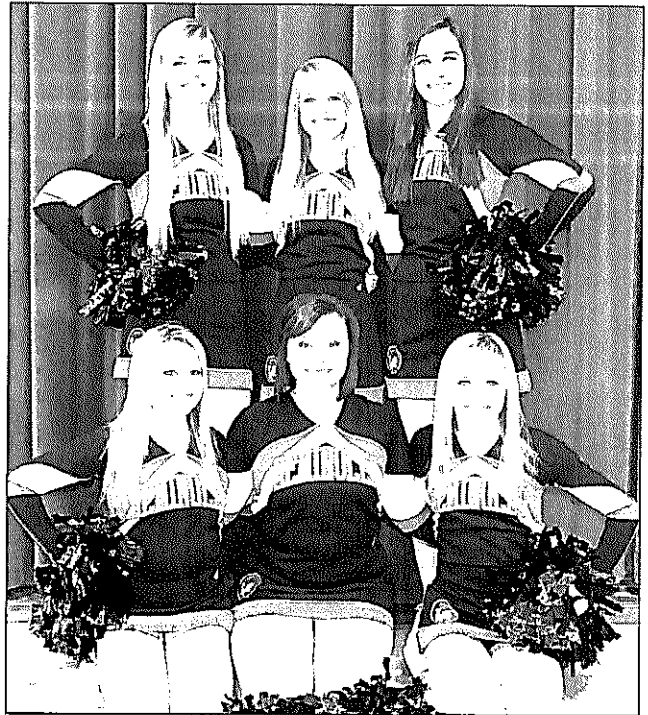
Because of her background, she said she's used to a small squad.

"I like it because we're tight-knit," she said. "The girls work together because really they have no other choice. I'm a little nervous about my first OVACs. But I just told the girls that the other teams would probably have more tumbling experience than us, but not to let that get them down. I just told them to put in a solid effort."

McVey said her girls' OVAC routine is fast-paced and eccentric, and it features moves that she hasn't seen a lot and it's going to surprise people.

"Tumbling is not one of our strengths,"

she said. "On our competition squad we only have two tumblers, so we're trying to use choreography. We're trying to make up for it with tight moves and strong showmanship."



## Head coach: Debbie Fish

The six seniors on the Oak Glen High School cheerleading squad have cheered together their whole lives, according to head coach Debbie Fish. A couple of them plan to cheer together in college at West Liberty University.

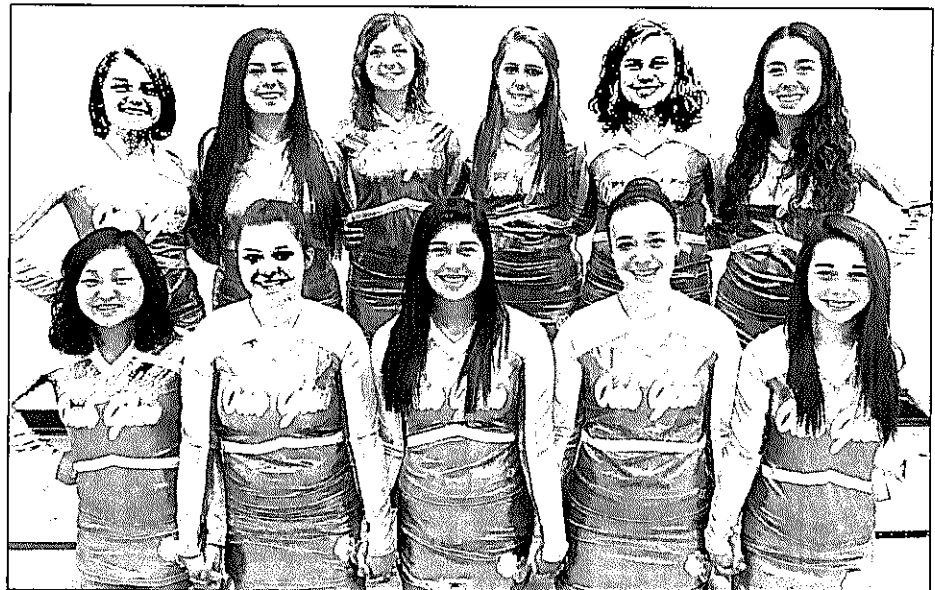
"I have to hand it to them," Fish said. "They've really stepped up their game this year to win. They want to have fun with it. But they're here to compete."

That's a good thing with the OVAC Cheering Championships at hand. As of now Oak Glen is practicing two hours a day each school day, and coming in for some Saturday practices as well. With the exception of a week off in November, they've been at it since August.

"It's a long, grueling season," Fish said. "And it can be hard to keep them focused."

But they're trying to sharpen that focus to best last year's finish in the 4A division at OVACs.

This year's squad consists of Lonna Cline, Marissa Davis, Kaitlyn Reed, Samantha Talbott, Hayley Yeater, Natelie Chappell, Alexandra Burchett, Tori Ignat, Carlie Ludovici, Autumn Owen, and Britney Jackson. Fish has an assistant in Weirton Elementary School



teacher Megan Baxter.

Fish got into coaching by way of the Oak Glen Junior Bears in Hancock County. Prior to that, she cheered for Oak Glen High School. She said she loves the sport, even though coaching presents its unique challenges.

"Coaching is a different ball game," she said. "You have to deal with little problems they might be having that day. But I have a good group of girls this year. They

haven't presented me with a whole lot of coaching problems."

The routine the squad will perform at this year's OVACs is probably the most difficult one Oak Glen has ever attempted.

"It's very quick-moving and there is a lot of tumbling," she said. "They have to be in really good condition so they're not completely worn out at the end. So that's our focus in practice now, just making sure they're well-conditioned."

# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Paden City Wildcats

**Head coach:  
Kimberly Hizer**

As one of the Ohio Valley's smallest high schools, Paden City has many of its cheerleaders playing multiple sports.

This is just one of the challenges faced by head cheering coach Kimberly Hizer leading up to the OVAC Cheerleading Championships.

"We're a very, very small school," she said. "And as a result we have girls who play multiple sports so we can field teams. They go from school to practice to practice and then home to do their homework."

"Right now I have three who play basketball and two in the band. During the fall we had six volleyball players. There are very few girls who just cheer."

That doesn't stop Hizer and assistant coach Michelle Gorby from doing their best, however. At last year's OVAC championship, their Paden City squad came in second in the 1A division.

"We were very happy with our performance last year," Hizer said. "We had put a lot of work into it. We've got dedicated girls."

So far this season the squad has only performed in the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championship in Parkersburg, where they placed fifth.



This year's squad consists of seniors Hannah Stanley, Kayla Hizer and Tori Anderson; junior Desiree Heasley; sophomores Kallie Arnett and Madison Kelly; and freshmen Jenna Arnett, Katrina Heasley and Malayna Price.

The Paden City cheering season starts in August and goes until the end of boys basketball. They practice anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half per practice, five days a week.

This is Hizer's second year as coach. Though she was not a cheerleader in high

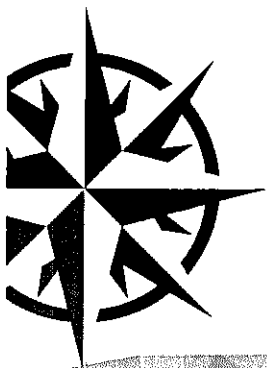
school, she worked for nine years at her sister-in-law's gym. Cheernastics in New Martinsville.

"I think each year the squad is special because of what each girl brings to the table," Hizer said.

"The girls are what make it special. This year they bring the ability to look at themselves and know when something isn't right. They just have this innate ability to see that somebody is doing something not in sync with the others. It's really nice when they can do that themselves."

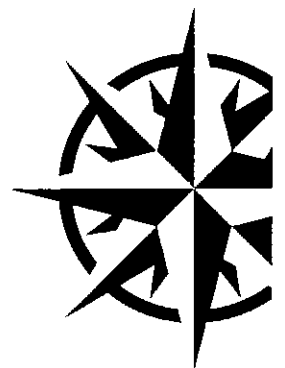
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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Parkersburg South Patriots

**Head coach: Maria Miller**

Several missteps dropped the Parkersburg South High School cheerleading squad to fifth place at November's West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships.

"I'm not thrilled with that. But it's OK. It happens," head coach Maria Miller said.

Parkersburg competes in the OVACs at the 5A level and Miller coaches with the help of assistants Cindy Burrows, Julie Lowers and Joni Eddy. At last year's OVAC Cheering Championships the squad finished fourth.

"I absolutely have higher hopes for this year," Miller said. "This year we have concentrated more on conditioning and tumbling. And we've been adding more practice time between games. ... The girls have absolutely responded. They're not happy with their finish last year either."

This year's squad consists of seniors Noah Grogg, Belle Stoops, Kenna Richards, Maddy White and Hayley Cunningham; juniors Tkeristen Sams, Megan Law, Leshae Eddy, Kelsi Camp and Regan Detamore; sophomore Autumn Deem; and freshmen Rayana Sayles, Keithlynn John-



son, Sylina Friesenhengst, Jodi Haggerty and Hannah Brannan.

This year marks Miller's 10th of being involved with Parkersburg South cheerleading. Though she didn't cheer in high school herself, she came on as an assistant and has been with the program ever since. She loves seeing the athleticism and dedication of her girls.

And she likes that her sport supports the rest of the high school's teams.

"I have a very good group of hard working girls," she said. "They have the desire this year to do better — not just in compe-

tion but to support their school. The true definition of the word cheerleader, as far as I'm concerned, is getting the crowd involved in games. Their dedication to the school means a lot more to me than any competition place could."

She said she's excited about this year's OVAC routine, which is "tumbling packed" and technically difficult.

"It's high energy from beginning to end," Miller said.

"And the music is interesting. It's a combination of new school and old school."

## River Pilots

**Head coach: Heidi Pfalzgraf**

The cheerleading squad at River High School didn't compete at last year's OVAC Cheering Championships, and they have yet to compete this year. So nobody's quite sure what to expect.

"This is the only competition we're going to do," said head coach Heidi Pfalzgraf.

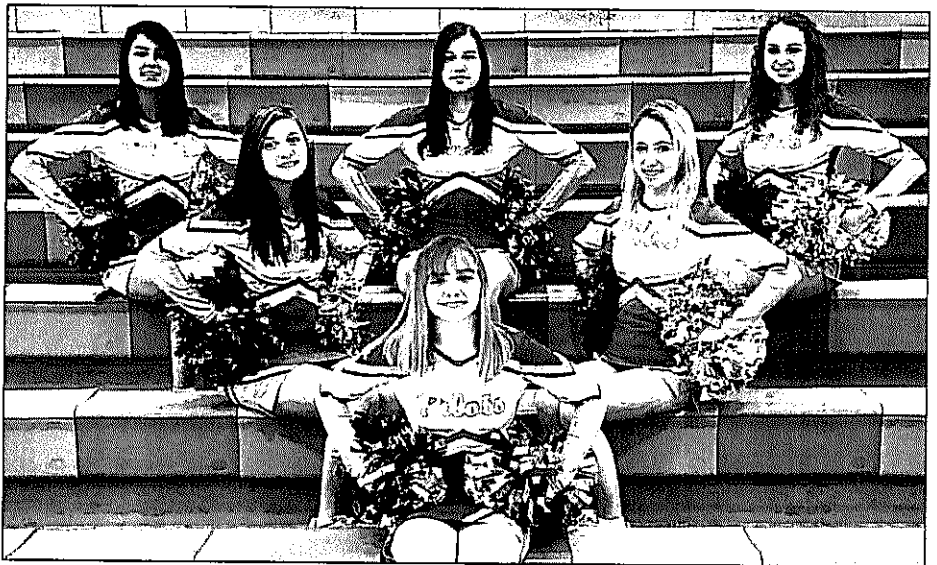
Pfalzgraf, along with assistant coach Jacque Brown, coach a squad of six girls. It includes juniors Celina Jakob and Chelsea Pandzik along with freshmen Alyson Johnson, Lilli Liskanich, Bre McElwayne and Karigan Pfalzgraf.

The last time the team competed at the OVAC Cheering Championships was in 2013, where they placed sixth in the 3A division.

"You bet we're hoping to do better," said Pfalzgraf. "We have more dedication this year. And that's my plan. The girls are much more into it. They're there every day at practice. They do not miss. And if I call off a practice, they're wanting to have it somewhere else by themselves."

Practice is typically held five days a week for two hours a practice. This in addition to two basketball games per week on average.

The season starts for the River Pilots in



June and extends through February. Some only cheer for football season. Others basketball. And of course the competition squad going to OVACs this year consists of both.

"This year's squad is special because they have a bond," Pfalzgraf said.

"And they're determined. They're very close. It's their dedication to the sport of cheerleading. If someone doesn't have a ride to practice, another girl is going to swing by her house and pick her up. They

just pump each other up. River hasn't been good at the OVACs and they want to get back in the books. They want to win something."

River is one of the few squads not using a professional choreographer to help prepare for this year's OVAC championship. The girls are coming up with music and a routine all on their own.

"I was surprised," Pfalzgraf said. "But they're doing amazingly well. They're getting it down and it looks great."



# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Shadyside Tigers Head coach: Melanie Haswell

When Shadyside High School competed at Cheer for a Cure in Columbus this January, they weren't sure what to expect. They were going up against Division 1 high schools such as Pickerington Central, Indian Valley and Newark.

"They have graduating classes of 500," said head cheer coach Melanie Haswell. "We have graduating classes of 54."

Despite the size differential, the Tigers came in second to Perry High School. Not a bad showing, all in all.

This year's squad consists of Megan Moodispaw, Brooke Breyer, Taylor Worley, Paige Heller, McKayla Kinemond, Pami Contraguero, Alexa Coggins, Julee Schuetz, Karly Klug, Sidney Wolgemuth, Lauren Bizzari, Mackenzie Darrah and Julia Weeks.

"Our cheering program has really expanded," Haswell said. "Two years ago we had seven girls. We went from seven to 15 last year. We started with 14 this year but one quit for personal reasons. The program has really gotten strong, which is a great thing."

Shadyside competes at the 2A level at the OVAC Cheering Championships. Last year's squad came in fourth place. But the girls have been practicing their routine



since October, Haswell said, and have been practicing three to five days a week, between one and a half and three hours a day.

"My seniors have been cheering since eighth grade," she said.

"I have two seniors. And my six sophomores won the junior OVAC competition when they were in junior high. So I have a lot of young cheerleaders. But my sophomores know what it's like to win it. This squad has a unity. There's no drama. And they work hard together. I told them it's basically in their hands. They know what

they have to do at this point. And that's be loud, hit their tumbling, strike their motions and be showy. The ball is in their court."

Haswell works hard to cultivate a sense of unity on her squad and is researching a potential overnight stay at Hershey Park as an incentive to work hard. There are trips to the movies, to Applebee's as well as slumber parties.

"Overall the girls are extremely excited this year," she said. "Everybody wants to win it."



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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## St. Clairsville Red Devils Head coach: Shawn Tomlan

They've learned their routine for the OVAC Cheering Championships. Now if they could only find gym time to get conditioned. This is the conundrum facing St. Clairsville High School Cheerleading Coach Shawn Tomlan.

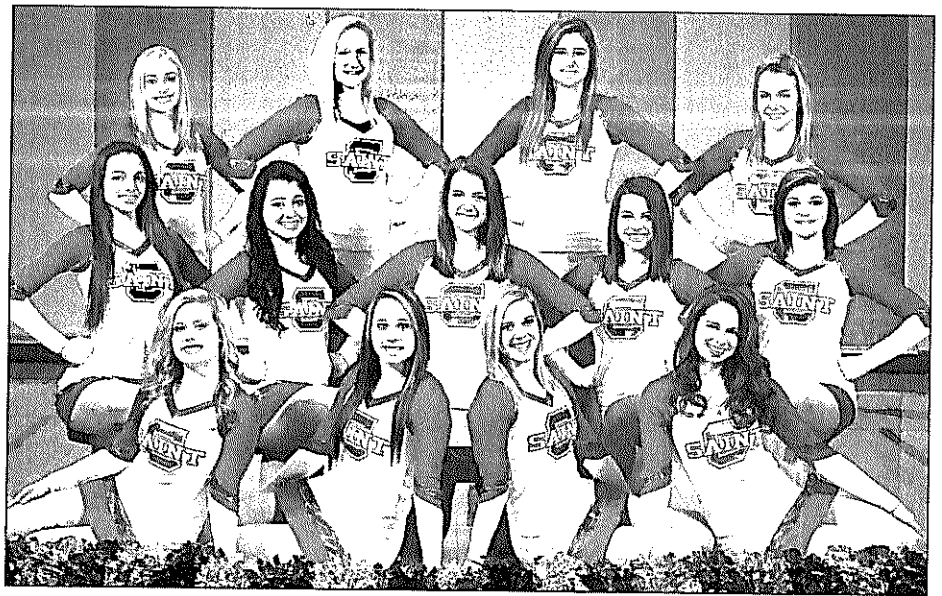
"Cheerleading is not considered a sport in Ohio like it is in West Virginia," she said.

"So our girls aren't a priority for gym time. That goes to boys and girls basketball. And with all the snow days they've been having, now they're rescheduling games. So getting gym time is hard. And if you don't get a gym, you're not going to be conditioned."

That's not the only adversity the squad has faced this year in trying to defend their current 4A OVAC title. They were unable to compete in the annual Buckeye 8 cheerleading competition as it was canceled this year, and two girls were lost to competition to injury. And to top it off Tomlan is in the middle of a rebuilding year.

But the Red Devils are soldiering on.

"Hopefully we'll be as good as we normally are," she said. "We have a lot of new faces. And I hope we have an entertaining



routine for the crowd to watch. But OVACs in itself is just an exciting day. It's a great competition. There are a lot of talented teams and a lot of talented girls. It's a fun day to come and watch. Our girls are always cheering for the football team and basketball team. OVACs is the one day people get to cheer them on."

This year's squad consists of seniors Samantha Collins, Abigail Earliwine, Alli Greenwood and Caitlin Wolfe; juniors Caitlyn Delbrugge, Dallas DeLong, Kaylie

Kindler and Cheyenne Westlake; sophomores Alyssa Haller and Cassidy Wolfe; and freshmen Caton Kadylak, Paige McGlothlin and Jessica Waggle.

Tomlan, a graduate of Bellaire High School, is proud of her girls because in addition to school and cheering they participate in a number of different community service projects, including Relay For Life and Head Start.

They also hold an annual cheering clinic for girls aged four through eighth grade.

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## St. John Central Fighting Irish Head coach: Doris Gordon

When Doris Gordon's niece told her St. John Central High School was in need of a cheerleading coach, she decided to give it a shot. That's how she found herself with a five-girl squad going into her first OVAC Cheering Championships.

"I'm the only coach," she said. "It's very time-consuming but I think it's worth it. So far it's been drama free but it is hectic. Every night there is something going on between practice and games. I work full time and then I go to practice after work. But you get energy from the kids and I'm glad I do it."

St. John competes at the 1A level at OVACs and last year's squad placed fourth. This year's contest will be the only competition attended by the Irish.

This year's squad includes senior Madison Stillwell; juniors Ashlyn Callarik and Charlie Scatterday; sophomore Allyson Goclan; and freshman Emma Cortopassi.

The Irish Cheerleading competition squad started practicing in earnest in mid-November and practice on average six to eight hours per week. That's spread across a four-hour Sunday practice and one week-day practice that can run anywhere from two to four hours.

"We've got a new choreographer this year and new music," Gordon said.

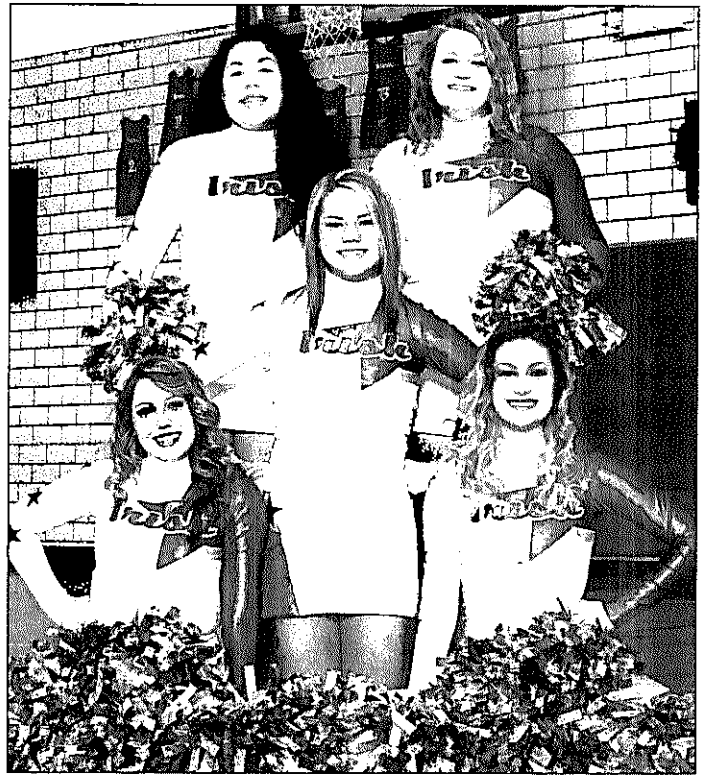
"The girls are working really hard to make this year great.

"They did well last year at OVACs but didn't score as well as they had hoped they would. This year they want to prove that they're worth it. That they can place. And I think they can do it."

Hopefully injuries won't be an issue, Gordon said. One of the five cheerleaders was recently released from a back injury. The squad looks to go into the championship at full strength.

Choreographer Joey Takacs had nothing but praise for the St. John Central cheerleaders.

"They're very hard working," he said. "You don't find that too often now days. I



work with 15 different schools and sometimes when I go to schools you don't find a good drive and a good work ethic. And that's not the case with St. John. They want to win."



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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Steubenville Big Red Head coach: Kelly Lancia

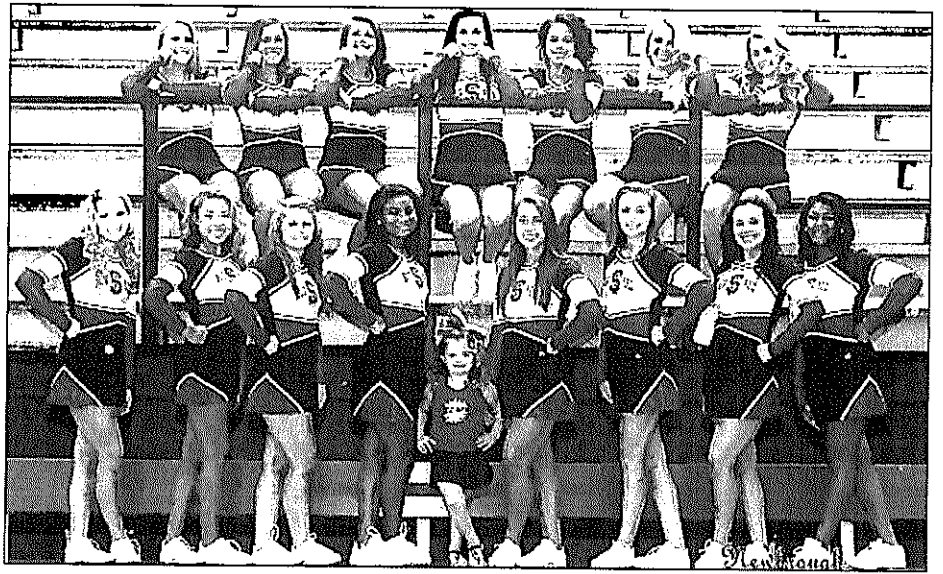
The Steubenville High School competition cheering season started off with a bang last summer. In August they were the grand champions of Kennywood's "Cheer-leading Day," an honor that landed them an all-expenses-paid berth in a national competition in Erie, Pa., in April.

"It was an amazing way to start our competition season," head coach Kelly Lancia said. She and assistant coach Carolissa Cucarese keep busy. In addition to their coaching duties they're responsible for running the concession stands at Big Red basketball games.

The season starts in the middle of July and goes through the end of boys basketball. Currently her squad is practicing four days a week, two and a half hours per day. Lancia is looking forward to the OVAC Cheering Championships to keep her girls motivated.

"We got third in 4A last year," she said. "And if I'm correct that's the first time Steubenville has placed third since I was cheering in high school in the early 2000s. This year we were moved to 5A and I have high hopes. We have a very young, but very talented team."

This year's Big Red cheerleading squad consists of seniors Alyssa Potenzini and Jasmine Hubbard; juniors Chaeli Cooper,



Samantha McDonald and Kaitlyn Wine-man; sophomores Jordie Ferguson, Lauren Ferrell, Kira Newburn, Mallory Mettenberger and Launastasis Pernick; and freshmen Jessica Walkosky, Emily King and Jalen Byrom.

"I only have two seniors this year and they're doing their best to keep the younger girls focused and in line," Lancia said. "They're extremely talented. Especially their tumbling skills They're setting the bar high for upcoming girls who are going to try out for Big Red. Every year I

make practice harder."

Lancia said that injuries have been an issue this year. One of her girls will be competing at OVACs with an injured back. And there are the inevitable knee injuries, sprained ankles and broken toes. She's particularly excited about this year's routine.

"It's very energetic," Lancia said. "The dancing is fast and everyone is constantly doing something different. There's a lot of tumbling. It hasn't always been the case, but Big Red can keep up with any other team in terms of tumbling."

# ROLL! BIG RED ROLL!

**From the Steubenville Board of Education,  
Administration, and Staff**



# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Toronto Red Knights Head coach: Marissa Rebich

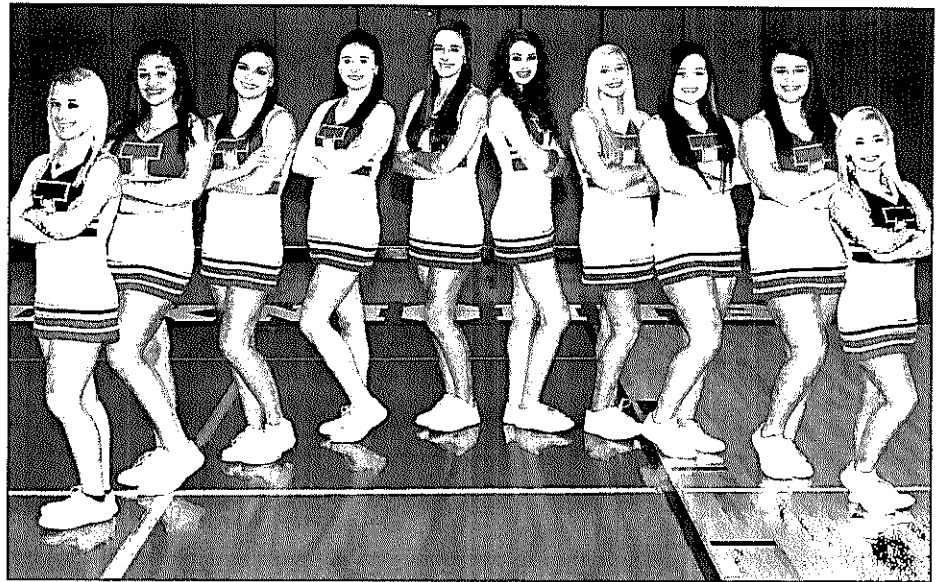
Toronto High School cheer coach Marissa Rebich was disappointed with her squad's third place finish at last year's OVAC Cheering Championships in the 2A division.

"We had a couple of falls. We're hoping for a better showing this year. It's our motivation. I keep telling them, 'You don't want third again.' They're not used to getting anything but first place," she said.

And first place is what Toronto received at the annual cheerleading competition at the Jefferson County Fair this past fall. That was in August and the girls have been at it since then, cheering football and basketball games, practicing on average four days a week. The only months the cheerleaders have off are April and May.

"Our girls work hard year-round," Rebich said. "This is what they live for. ... We're really hoping for a win this year at OVACs. We use a different style of cheering. We're more of an all-star team. We don't do a lot of crowd cheering. And there's good choreography, a good pom dance and a lot of tumbling this year."

This year's squad consists of Makayla Bauman, Carli Winstel, Elyse Price, Mollie Chetock, Johna Bell, Meghan Rawson,



Hannah Parker, Aubrey Saner, Jazalyn Glenn and Jenna Leasure. Sarah Nett helps out as an assistant coach and local cheering guru Joey Takacs has worked on the choreography.

Rebich is a graduate of Steubenville Catholic Central High School, where she cheered for two years.

This is her first year at the helm of Toronto's cheering program.

She's more worried about this year's injuries.

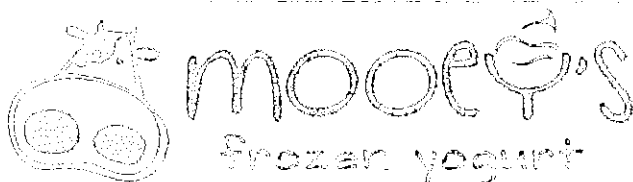
"Usually around OVACs things start hurting," she said. "You start icing and wrapping more. This year we've had a surgery. She's trying to pull through. Some foot and leg injuries. Everyone is struggling right now. Trying to wrap and tape legs and we're hoping we should be good to go."

Elaborating on the Toronto OVAC routine, Rebich said the music selections include oldies for the adults in attendance as well as some hip hop and Latin.

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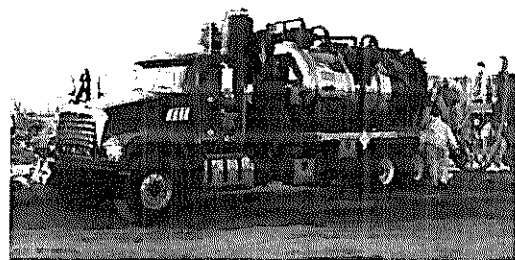
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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Tyler Consolidated Silver Knights Head coach: Stefanie Suter

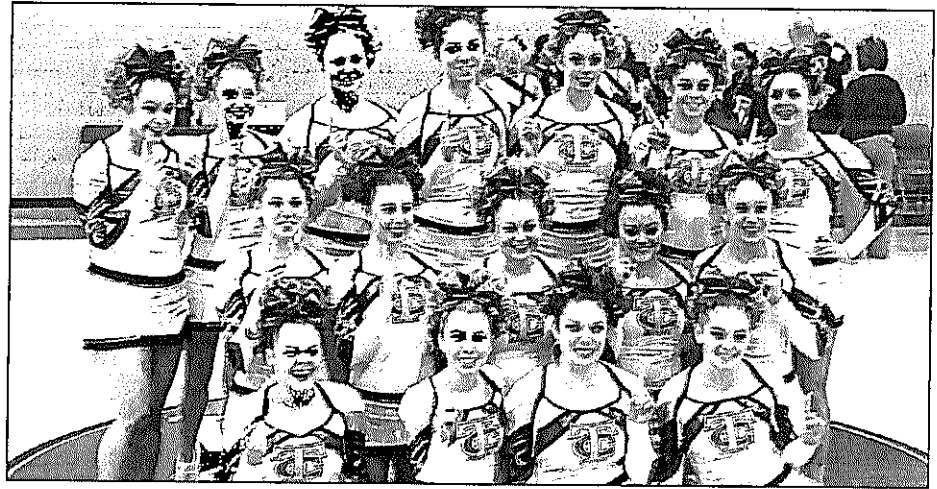
The cheerleaders of Tyler Consolidated might have the most competition time under their belts going into this year's OVAC Cheering Championships. So far the squad has participated in an October competition at George Washington High School (first place), the Little Kanawha Conference Championships (first place), the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships (second place) and the West Virginia State Cheering Championships (third place.)

Now, if they could only beat The Linsly School.

"We compete at the 3A level at OVAC," head coach Stefanie Suter said. "And last year we got second place to Linsly. It was kind of a shock to everybody because we thought we had won but they ended up winning by two points."

Their runner-up status didn't come for lack of effort. The Tyler Consolidated cheering season starts at the beginning of August and runs through February. They practice six days a week, two hours a day on average.

"My philosophy is just trying to keep everybody healthy," Suter said. "And that's



about knowing what your kids can do and not pushing them too hard. Cheering is a long season and it's easy to get injured. It's not like basketball or football where you can send in a substitute if someone gets injured."

This year's squad consists of seniors Megan Wilson, Laken Miller, Sierra Mace and Brooke Keys; juniors Jayme Jeffers and Katlyn Seckman; sophomores Shayla Griffey, Taylor Vandruff, Seminole Weekley, Lexi Jenkins, Devann McCoy, Brooklyn Pittman, Tessa Boyd and Megan Miller; and freshmen Autumn Kunkel and Scottlynn Straight. And Suter coaches with assistant Laci Strode.

"We've done really well this year,"

Suter said.

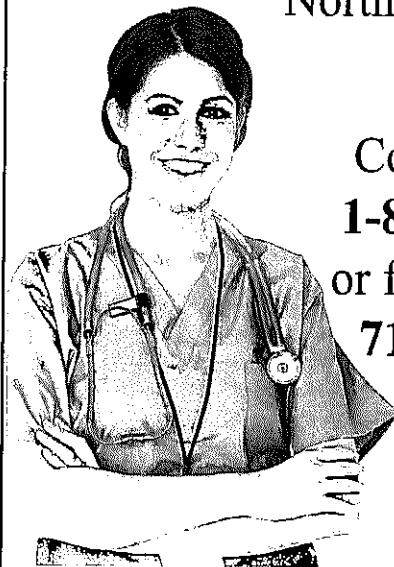
"We've had a couple of first place finishes and were competitive at states. If we win OVACs this year it will be the 10th title in Tyler cheering history. We have a big fan base and the OVACs are our thing. We're not a new face to winning championships there."

Suter said the squad is going into the competition injury-free, and that the routine features lots of tumbling and dance. She drew from her own experience of cheering for Tyler (1999-2003) to motivate her girls.

"When I was in school my team won OVACs all four years," she said. "I want my girls to experience that feeling."

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Weir Red Riders

**Head coach:  
Sarah Walter**

When Weir High cheer coach Sarah Walter looked at her competition squad last summer, she realized that they were young and not terribly experienced.

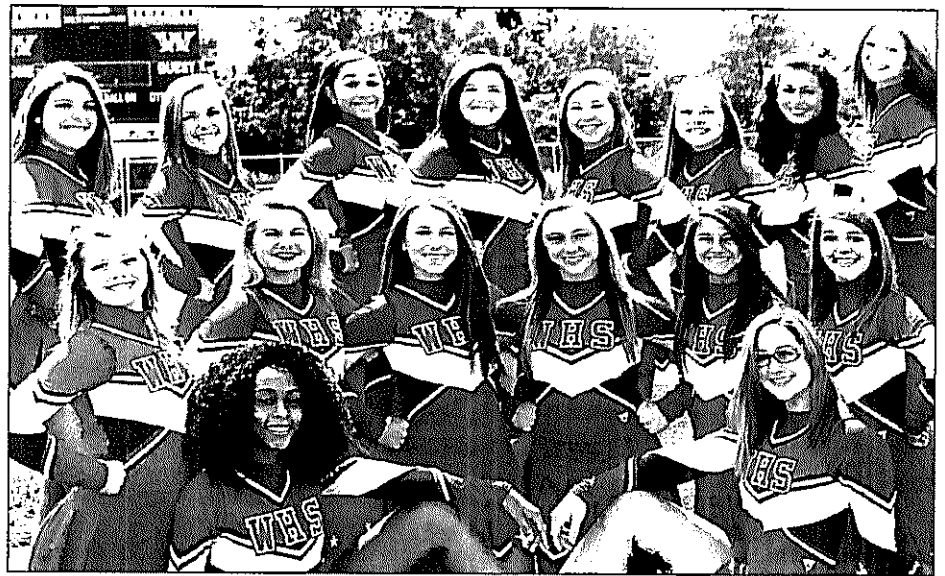
"My main goal for them was to be able to perform a 'switch liberty' — a stunt where the flyer or top person starts the jump on one foot and switches to the other in mid air — and we achieved that," she said. "And as a coach, meeting that goal meant more to me that had my girls qualified for states."

So far this year the Weir squad has only competed at the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships in Parkersburg.

They came in fourth place. They're hoping for a stronger finish at this year's OVACs.

"We placed second last year competing as a 4A school," Walter said.

"This year we've been bumped up to 5A and that changes a lot of things. The competition is a lot more competitive at the 5A level so it's been a huge change for us. As a result we've tried to step up our tumbling. So we've been going to actual tumbling classes and tumbling more often in practice than usual."



They practice six days a week for two hours a day.

On those days when another gym is not available they'll make do in an empty hallway, the stage of the school theater or even the cafeteria.

"What makes this team special, for me, is that they're so young," Walter said. "We only have one senior."

That senior is Savanna Truax. The rest of the squad consists of juniors Adriana DiMatteis, Steffani Cummins and Alicia Palmeri; sophomores Macey Gump, Lacy

Zellars, Lexus Ficca, Isabella Kirlangitis, Gianna De Vechesis, Alayna Degenhardt and Amelia Adams; and freshmen Maya Yobbagy, Caroline Fodor and Kenzie Rusinovich.

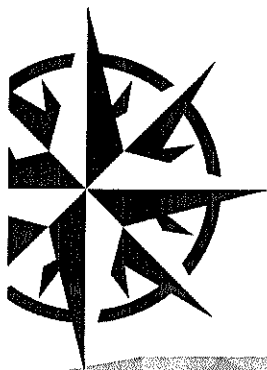
People should watch out for their OVAC routine because it's "jam-packed" with tumbling, Walter said.

"OVACs are the biggest competition in our schedule," she said.

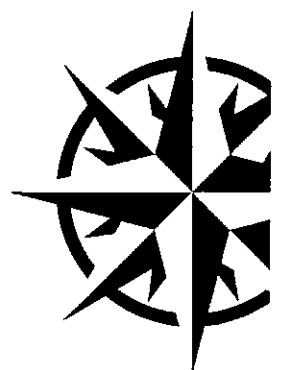
"Especially because of our rivalry with Wheeling Park. Our routine this year is high-energy with lots of tumbling."

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Weirton Madonna Blue Dons Head coach: Michelle Kuczynski

Despite being down to six girls due to injury and fewer girls trying out for the team, the cheerleaders of Weirton Madonna High School refused to throw in the towel at November's West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships. There were not enough girls to perform mounting or stunting, and the resulting ground-bound routine garnered them a place near the bottom.

Head Coach Michelle Kuczynski could not have been prouder had they won the whole thing.

"They kept going because they have the heart," she said. "They weren't going to quit. That would be the easy way out. They wanted to go down there and do the best with what they had."

Since last fall, the competition squad has grown to 12 members, and it's going into the OVAC Cheering Championships relatively healthy. Kuczynski and assistant coach Samantha Cappuccio have high hopes. "We came in third place last year," Kuczynski said. "And a year before that we came in second. We definitely plan to finish higher this year."

This year's squad consists of Gabriella



Anile, Gaby Kotten, Eva Bowser, Tomi Pavan, Molly Pavan, Carly Wilson, Maria Mazzone, Hannah Barger, Rachel Weaver, Isabella Defelice, Catherine Liss and Mal-lory Santoro.

What makes them special, Kuczynski said, is their heart and dedication.

"They've overcome a lot of adversity," she said. "Especially at the start of the year. And throughout the year they're supporting everybody else. We do two competitions a year. They deserve to get some of that support in return."

Their OVAC routine was designed by

local choreographer Joey Takacs, and features music from the 1990s as well as some newer songs.


"It's just really cute and fun," Kuczynski said. "The music relates to every generation."

Kuczynski cheered at Madonna as a high school student and one year at West Liberty University. She has coached at Madonna since 2008. She said she encourages her girls to befriend cheerleaders from other schools.

Madonna will compete at the 1A level at OVACs.

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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Wheeling Central Catholic Maroon Knights Head coach: Jessica Becker

The Wheeling Central Catholic High School cheerleading squad is still riding the high from winning last year's OVAC Cheering Championships in class 2A.

"It was an unforgettable experience," said head coach Jessica Becker. "The girls worked so hard to win. We hadn't won a title in seven years so they were hungry for it."

The team didn't hold practices during the off-season but they did take advantage of three practice weeks in June. Then there were August tryouts and it was off to the races. Six days a week of practice and games all the way through March.

"It's essentially a nine-month-long season," Becker said. "The girls are really committed to Wheeling Central cheering in that they're doing something cheer-related six days a week."

So far this year Central has only competed in the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships in Parkersburg, where they placed fourth.

This year's squad includes seniors Karina Smith and Allison Mokros; juniors



Teresa Pockl, Sierra McCutcheon, Zoe Kahle, JaiEhir Jackson, Lexi DaRe and Alena Costain; sophomores Bailey Wear, Cassidy Sansone and Kayhlee Butler; and freshmen Morgan Petchar, Shayna Caldwell and Carly Pajak.

The team this year has had to battle many injuries and other setbacks.

"But we're looking forward to defending our OVAC title," she said.

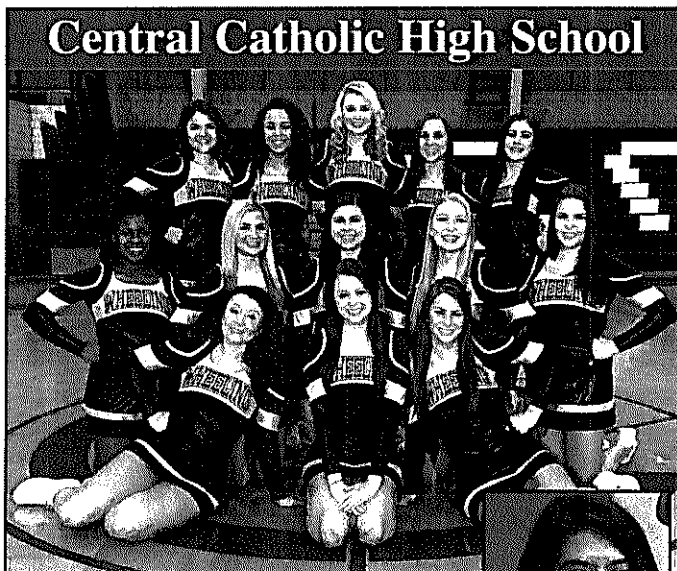
"It's challenging for the girls to balance their commitment to cheering both the boys and girls basketball teams as well as preparing for the routine. And remember

they're also keeping up with schoolwork and church commitments."

Becker coaches with the help of assistant Corey Pietranton.

"It started out a little rough," Pietranton said.

"We had a lot of injuries that kept us from performing like we normally do at regionals. We were even limited by the number of girls we could put on the floor. ... But we can be at almost full strength and put 14 girls on the floor for OVACs. I don't think we're back at 100 percent yet, but we're definitely on our way."



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# 2015 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Wheeling Park Patriots

Head coach:  
**Shawna Shepherd**

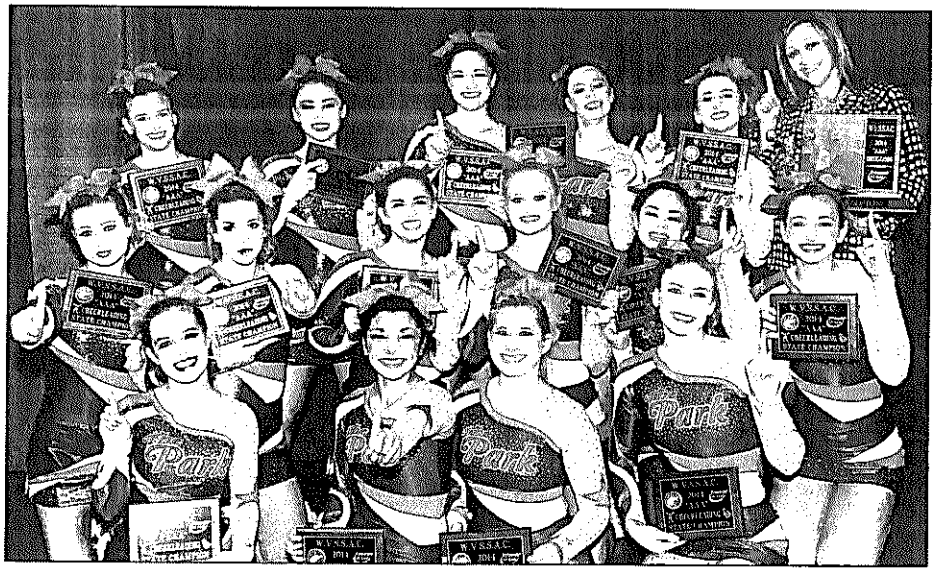
It's been a great season so far for the Wheeling Park cheerleaders.

A second place showing at the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Regional Cheerleading Championships got them to the state finals, where they came in first in their division.

"It's the first time we've won the state title in 25 years," head coach Shawna Shepherd said. "They're just a really hard working group of girls, both on and off the floor. They're good representatives of Wheeling Park High School."

This year's competition squad consists of seniors Torey Reed and Kailee Shelek; juniors Kayley Miller, Natalie Wiethe, Jordan Stahl, Kaylah Rutherford, Kasie Stewart and Bre Ross; sophomores Sydney Moffett and Abby Hudrik; and freshmen Katie Angius, Katie Bleifus, Meghan Murphy, Bria Stigarelli and Abby Skrzypek.

Shepherd coaches with the help of assistant Mackenzie Filtz and her squad competes in the OVAC Cheering Championships in the 5A division. She herself cheered at Wheeling Park High School,



and started her coaching career at Triadelphia Middle School and Linsly.

When the head coaching job at Wheeling Park opened 10 years ago, she made the move.

"We are hoping to put on a really good show," Shepherd said of this year's OVAC routine. "When the girls get in front of a crowd they really turn it on. They really play off the crowd. It's a big thing that helped us out at states."

"The OVAC routine has great energy. We do a lot of tumbling and then go into

our cheer. It's very different from our typical West Virginia style. We dance, tumble and cheer and have a good time."

Injuries have been an issue, as five to six days a week of practice produces wear and tear. But Shepherd is more concerned about the weather.

"We're still hoping for the snow bird to cooperate and for us to be in school," she said. "Last year we had trouble practicing because of all the snow. If we can stay healthy and stay in school, we'll be good to go for OVACs."

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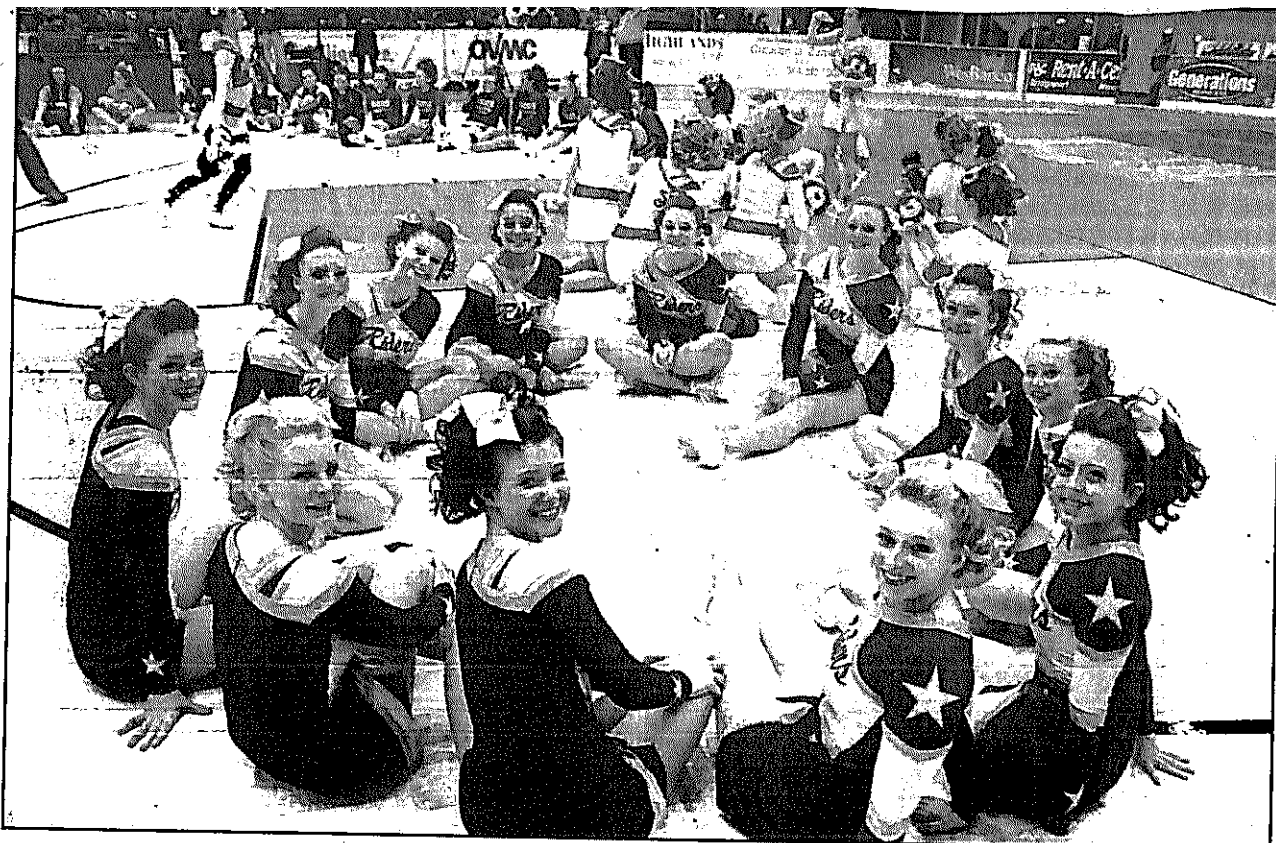
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MARTINS FERRY cheerleaders sit at last year's OVAC Cheering Competition and await for trophy and awards. The 24th Annual OVAC Cheering Competition will take place on Saturday. T-L Photo/ MICHAEL PALMER

# OVAC Cheering Competition to be held this Saturday

By **MIKE PALMER**  
Times Leader Staff Writer

WHEELING -- Teams around the Ohio Valley will travel to WesBanco Arena this Saturday for the 24th annual OVAC Cheering Competition.

While many squads work year-round on their routines, the competition cheer season for most schools begins in June and runs through February when the hours of hard work culminate in one single three-minute routine on the mats in Wheeling.

There are five divisions with 29 schools vying for titles in their respective classes this year.

Defending champions are: 1A - Bishop Donahue; 2A - Wheeling Central; 3A - Linsly; 4A - St. Clairsville and 5A - Wheeling Park.

"Some of the divisions have changed this year due to enrollment so that could make things interesting," said OVAC Cheer Director Libby Shepherd. "We also have a number of new coaches this year."

"There really aren't any major rule changes this year," Shepherd stated. "The cheer part of the routine has to be at least 30 seconds, that was new last year and the total routine is 3 minutes maximum."

The pressure is once again on St. Clairsville after win-

## OVAC Cheering Competition

**WHEN:** Saturday, Feb. 7  
**WHERE:** WesBanco.  
**TIME:** 10 a.m.

ning its seventh straight 4A crown last year.

"It is nothing new for us, we are aware of the target on our back," said Red Devils cheering coach Shawn Tomlin. "It will be a tough competition as always, everyone has been working hard, we will give it our best and see what the judges decide."

The schools will perform in front of five judges and two safety judges, beginning with Class AA.

Performing first on the day is Class-AA, then AAA and then A to follow. Teams will perform in the following order:

Six squads in AA: Cameron, Shadyside, Wheeling Central, Clay-Battelle, Toronto and Bridgeport. Six squads in AAA: Monroe Central, Barnesville, Tyler, Magnolia, River, Linsly and Bellaire.

Seven in A: St. John, Beallsville, Madonna, Bishop Donahue, Paden City and Conotton Valley.

Immediately following the Class-A performances, awards will be presented in the non-tumbling and classes A, AA and AAA. The Class-5A and Class-4A competitions will be held after the morning awards program.

Six in 5A: John Marshall, Steubenville, Indian Creek, Weir, Parkersburg South and Wheeling Park.

See, **CHEERING**, Page A2

## ● Cheering

Continued from Page A1

Just four teams in 4A: Martins Ferry, St. Clairsville, Oak Glen and Harrison Central.

One of the highlights each year is when the division winners of the OVAC junior high cheering competition, which was held in October, have the opportuni-

ty to perform before the crowd during judging breaks.

Doors open to the public at 8:30 a.m. with the Class AA competition beginning at 10. Cost is \$6 for adults and \$4 for students.

Palmer may be reached at [mpalmer@timesleaderonline.com](mailto:mpalmer@timesleaderonline.com)

# CONGRATULATIONS St. Clairsville Red Devils



Front Row, From Left, Michaela Miller, Sam Collins, Gaitlin Wolfe, Abby Earliwine and Alli Greenwood. In Back, From Left, Coach Shawn Tomlan, Jessica Waggle, Alyssa Haller, Cassidy Wolfe, Cheyenne Westlake, Kaylie Kindler, Dallas DeLong, Caitlyn Debrugge, Caton Kadylak and Paige McGlothlin.

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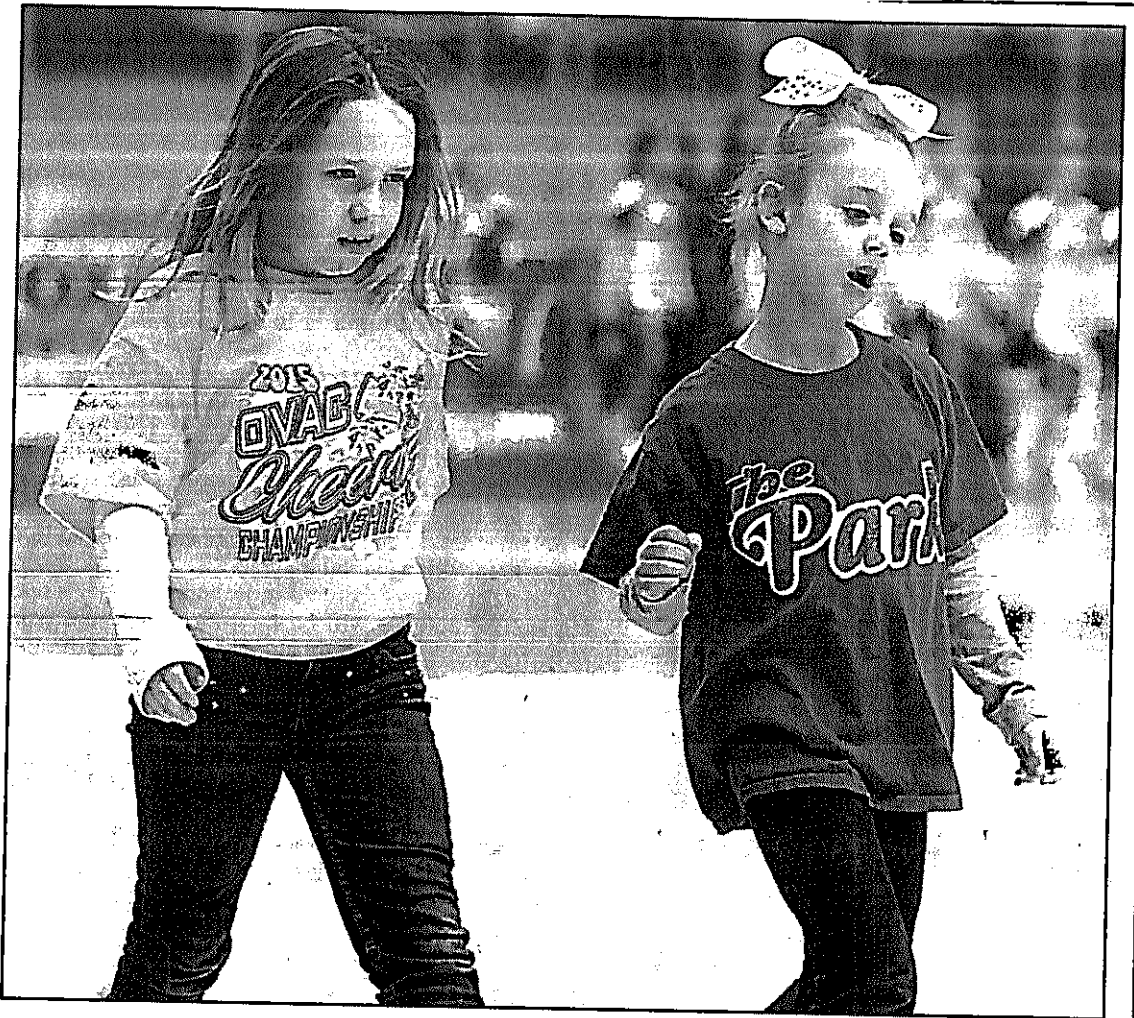
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**LOOKING VERY** intent on their task of cleaning up the competition floor after each performance at the OVAC Cheerleading Championships are future Wheeling Central cheer hopeful Jocelyn Waterhouse, age 7, and future Wheeling Park cheerleader Karringtyn Miller, age 5. *For additional photos view [cu.timesleaderonline.com](http://cu.timesleaderonline.com)*

T-L Photo/MIKE PALMER

## Red Devils continue OVAC cheerleading dominance

By **MIKE PALMER**  
Times Leader Staff Writer

**WHEELING** -- The word of the day was "dynasty" at the 24th Annual OVAC Cheering Championships Saturday at WesBanco Arena.

In the afternoon session, the St. Clairsville cheerleaders won their eighth straight title claiming Class 4A while Wheeling Park retained the 5A crown to claim its 18th championship.

All five champions on the day defended their 2104 titles as Bishop Donahue successfully

retained their single A crown, Linsly repeated in 3A and Wheeling Central claimed the 2A title again by a thin margin as Toronto finished just five points behind the Maroon Knights.

"It feels great," said St. Clairsville coach Shawn Tomlin. "We put in a lot of hard work and after football it is pretty much full time without a break, so it is just incredible to think that we have won eight straight."

The Red Devils will celebrate this victory but the season which began with summer practice

back in July is not over, their sights are set on a state title in the Ohio competition on March 1.

"It is a lot of pressure on these girls. We practice seven months for just two three-minute routines," Tomlin explaining that it would be like football players getting just two series of downs. "It is make or break for your whole season."

The Red Devils finished ahead of Martins Ferry in 4A. The Purple Riders celebrated a run-

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# OVAC Cheering Champs



T-L Photo/MIKE PALMER

PICTURED IS the St. Clairsville High cheerleaders after they captured their eighth straight OVAC championship Saturday afternoon at WesBanco Arena in Wheeling. Front row, from left, are Michaela Miller, Sam Collins, Caitlin Wolfe, Abby Earliwine and Alli Greenwood. In back, from left, are Coach Shawn Tomlan, Jessica Waggle, Alyssa Haller, Cassidy Wolfe, Cheyenne Westlake, Kaylie Kindler, Dallas DeLong, Caitlyn Delbrugge, Caton Kadylak and Paige McGlothlin.

## ● Cheer

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ner-up trophy while Harrison Central finished third in the division.

Weir moved up from 4A into 5A and challenged Wheeling Park for the title. The Red Riders were just six points behind the local favorites. Indian Creek once again finished third in the big school division.

The 2A division was tight with just 20 points separating the top four squads as Shadyside went home

empty handed after a crowd-pleasing performance. The Tigers were edged by Clay-Battelle and missed the trophy round. "You hope for the best and prepare for the worst," said Shadyside coach Melanie Haswell.

Weirton Madonna took silver in single A, while Paden City wrapped up bronze in the small school division.

In addition to the main competition, the Junior High OVAC squads also

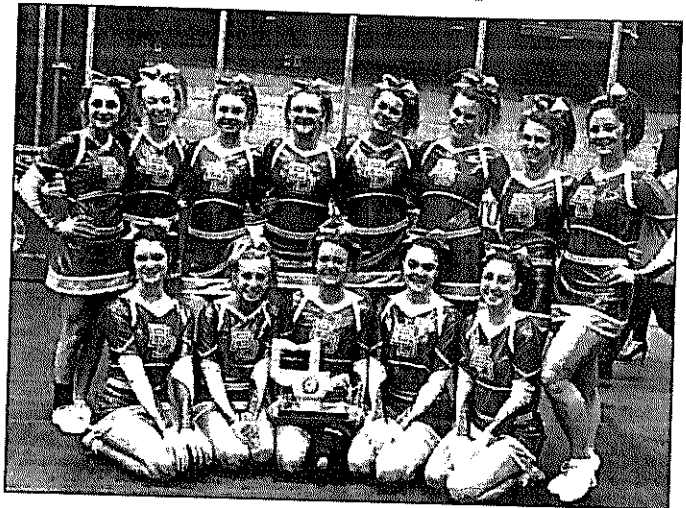
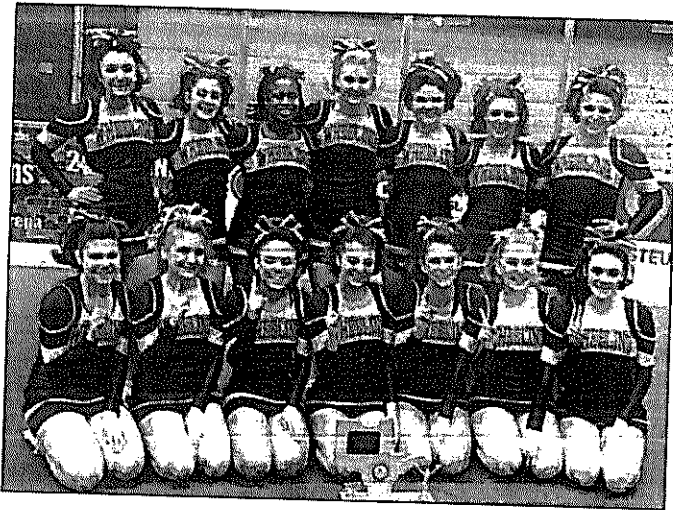
had an opportunity to take to the hardwood and perform during the competition.

The small middle school winner was Toronto Middle School, Medium Middle school winner was Wellsburg, Large Middle school winner was Triadelphia and Junior Varsity winner was Wheeling Park JV.

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# 2015 OVAC Cheering Championships



Wheeling Central, top left, Bishop Donahue, top right, Linsly, bottom left, St. Clairsville, bottom right, and Wheeling Park, center, took home Ohio Valley Athletic Conference cheering championships Saturday at WesBanco Arena.

Photos by Mike Palmer

## Three Cheers for the Champs

Park, Central, Bishop Donahue, Linsly, St. Clairsville win titles

By DORSEY KINDLER  
Staff Writer

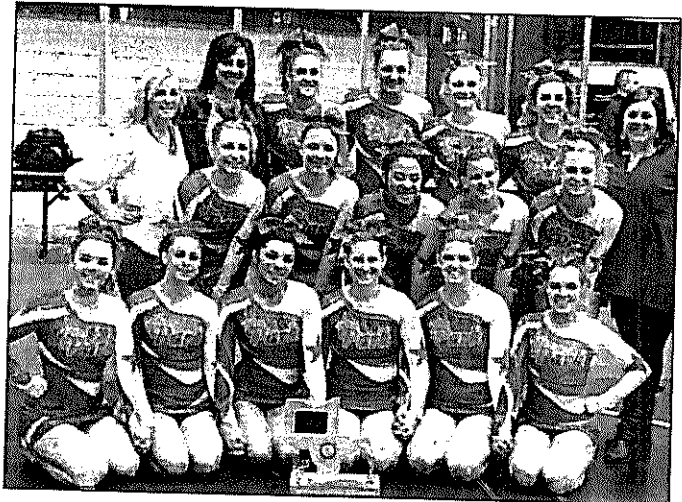
WHEELING — It was deja vu all over again at the 2015 OVAC Cheering Championships on Saturday. All five of last year's champions came back to win again at WesBanco Arena.

"I have the greatest parents and support system in the whole OVAC and WVSSAC," said Shawna Shephard, coach of the 5A Champion Wheeling Park Patriots.

She said that her squad was lucky in that it got to compete last in its division. Prior to taking the floor she could be heard coaching her girls on the do's and don't's of proper "facials." (If you think you're being overly obnoxious, she said, you're doing it right.)

"Weir High did a great job as did a lot of other schools in our division," she said. "But my girls put everything on the floor. And they couldn't have done any better in my opinion."

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## CHEERS

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*Continued from page B1*

Prior to taking the floor, Coach Megan Caruso could be seen spraying her Linsly Cadets with a "calming mist." Perhaps that was the key to their repeat victory at OVACs this year.

"After they performed I felt pretty confident," she said. "But you never know. It's always up to the judges to determine whether they like one routine or the other. Tyler Consolidated was really tough. But I think our routine was extremely entertaining. That's kind of what won over the judges."

Wheeling Central Catholic's Jessica Becker was on the edge of her seat when the winner in Class 2A was announced. When she heard that her squad had won it was pure excitement. Becker owes a lot to the fans, she said.

"We appreciate it so much," she said of the support the Maroon Knights received this season. "It's nice to have all of our

parents and siblings and members of the faculty here to support us."

And in division 1A, Dana Mele's Bishop Donahue Bishops took the crown.

"It was down to the last second," she said. "Everybody brought their 'A' game this year. Madonna did a phenomenal job. It's a minute-by-minute routine out there and anything could happen. And everybody's bringing their best. Luckily our game was on."

The St. Clairsville Red Devils placed first in 4A. Coach Shawn Tomlan said the repeat was a result of a lot of hard work on the part of her girls.

"Every year, being defending champs, you want to make sure that the seniors get a first place again," she said.

Tomlan chose not to watch any of the 4A schools compete, but said she felt good about her squad's chances after it nailed its routine.

# Bulldogs' Boy Cheerleader Set To Take Stage at OVAC Competition

By DORSEY KINDLER  
Staff Writer

BRIDGEPORT — The only male competing in this year's OVAC Cheering Championship will be Bridgeport's Kyle Lindsey. The junior is a relatively new addition to the Bulldogs' eight-person competition squad. And so far it's working out well according to head coach Erika Harvey.

"Everyone would ask me if Kyle was going to make the squad," she said. "And I told them if he's up to my expectations then yes he'll make it. I said I'm not going to put him on just because he's a boy. Because I'm not going to put you on the squad just because you're a girl. Because I have very high expectations. And he's definitely exceeded those expectations for sure."

Lindsey said he's wanted to cheer for some time now, but just recently found the nerve to try out. He also competes in track, running the hurdles, 100-yard-dash, four by 100 relay and four by 400 relay. The tumbling has been the most difficult for him to master. He augments his practice with classes at Turn It Out in Bellaire. Which helped him master the difficult roundoff tuck.

"It's like a back handspring with on hands in the air," he said.

He said that he feels like he's ready for the OVACs this today and that so far he hasn't encountered any teasing for participating in a traditionally female-dominated sport.

"Kyle is a very likable guy," said Bridgeport High School Principal Rob Zitzelsberger. "He has a lot of friends at Bridgeport. Nobody pokes fun of him because he's a male cheerleader. In fact, when he tried out, he didn't have the required pair of white tennis shoes. So I ended up lending him a pair of mine. If you want to try something, I'm going to give you the



Photo by Dorsey Kindler  
Bridgeport's male cheerleader Kyle Lindsey will join his squad for this year's OVAC Cheering Competition today.

means to do it."

Zitzelsberger said Lindsey's efforts could help break the ice for other guys who might want to give cheerleading a try. He said he was particularly impressed that he made the squad in his first year out as he was competing for a spot against girls who'd been cheering and tumbling most of their lives.

"It's not easy for a male to go and try out and make it," he said. "You've got to be flexible, have some agility and have some skill. For him to make that? It's pretty impressive. I believe

cheering is a sport. They work hard. And it's nice to see a male involved in that. It's what he really loves to do."

Senior cheerleader Abbey Gresham said she's seen a lot of improvement in Lindsey over the season, and that working with him has been bitter-sweet.

"It's nice to see someone with such a strong passion for the sport come and improve day after day, practice after practice," she said. "At first he was kind of crazy. His emotions were all over the place. But now his motions are a lot tighter. And his tumbling has improved terrifically. He's now tucking in his back tucks. He's just fun to watch. He looks like he was meant to do this."

Bridgeport is now known in the Ohio Valley cheering community as "that squad with the boy on it" according to Harvey. And in addition to that notoriety she and the girls have enjoyed the occasional comic relief that comes with having him at practice.

"There was one time at the beginning of the season when he was fixing his standing back handspring," she said. "And he wasn't completely strong with it. In practice I said, 'Okay guys. Full out. It's time to do the back handspring.' You have to sit in a chair position and push off your legs and bend backwards. We he sat and bent backwards and didn't jump. And he completely landed on his head and did a belly flop onto the floor. And I just looked at him and said, 'Kyle what happened?' and he said he forgot to jump."

Harvey said she's confident Lindsey will do well at OVACs. And that even though he's never performed in front of a crowd before, that his smile will win people over.

"You can't stop watching him," she said. "It's amazing."