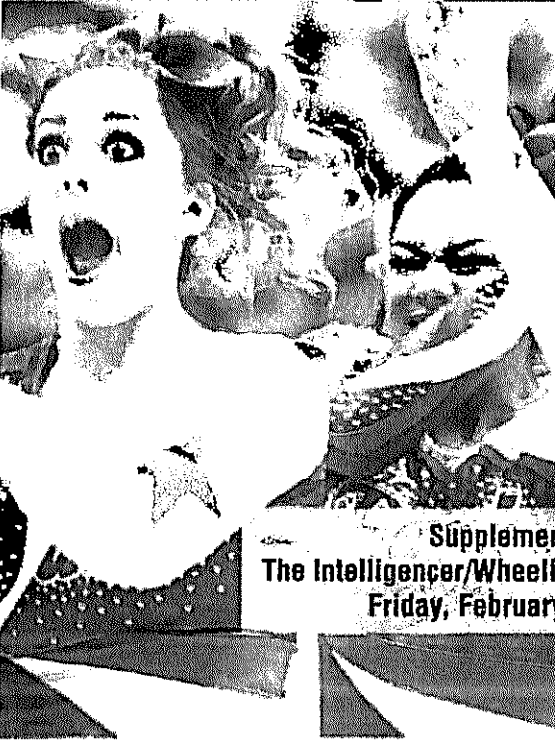
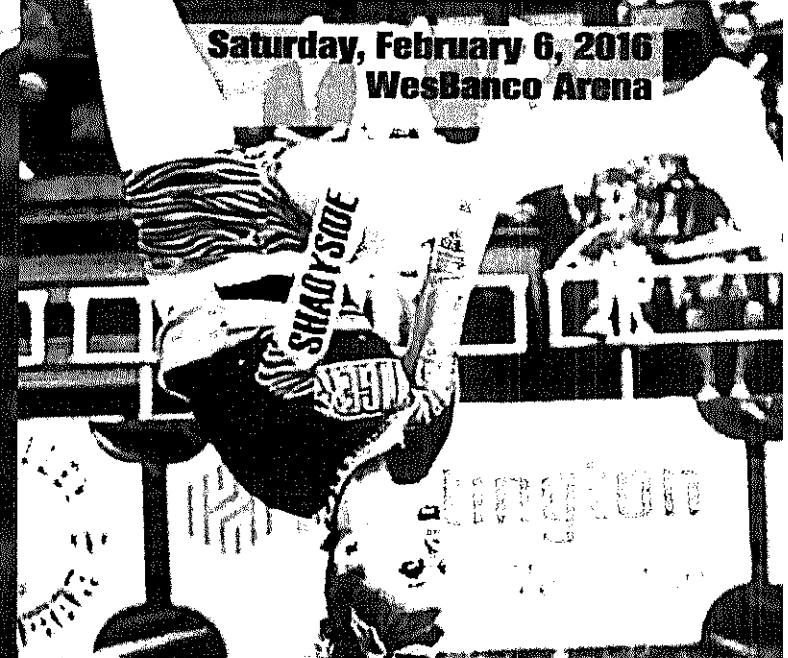


CHEERING

CHA



Supplement to
The Intelligencer/Wheeling News-Register
Friday, February 5, 2016

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Cheering fans of The Valley unite!

This weekend will see 25 cheering squads descend on WesBanco Arena at 14th and Water streets in Wheeling to compete for a coveted title at the 25th annual Ohio Valley Athletic Conference Cheering Championships. The squads range in size from four to 15 and hail from Conotton Valley to Cameron (and all points in between).

The doors open at 8 a.m. for participants and 8:30 a.m. for the public. Competition will continue throughout the day.

All 25 of the teams participating this year are highlighted inside. They are, by division:

1A – Bishop Donahue, Conotton Valley, Madonna, Paden City, St. John Central.

2A – Bridgeport, Cameron, Shadyside, Toronto, River.

3A – Barnesville, Bellaire, Linsly, Shenandoah, Steubenville Catholic Central.

4A – Harrison Central, Indian Creek, Martins Ferry, Oak Glen, St. Clairsville, Union Local.

5A – John Marshall, 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.

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Saturday, Feb. 6, 2016

WesBanco Arena

Doors open at 8 a.m. for participants, 8:30 a.m. for the public; warm-ups at 8:20 a.m. 1A competition begins at 9:15 a.m.

25 teams compete for crowns in five divisions

*Stories compiled by
Dorsey Kindler, Sports Writer*

Barnesville	p. 3	Linsly	p.11	Shenandoah	p. 18
Bellaire	p. 4	Martins Ferry	p. 12	Steubenville Catholic Central	p. 18
Bishop Donahue	p. 5	Oak Glen	p. 13	Steubenville	p. 19
Bridgeport	p. 6	Paden City	p. 13	Toronto	p. 20
Cameron	p. 7	River	p. 14	Union Local	p. 21
Conotton Valley	p. 8	St. Clairsville	p. 15	Weir High	p. 21
Harrison Central	p. 8	St. John Central	p. 16	Weirton Madonna	p.22
Indian Creek	p. 9	Shadyside	p. 17	Wheeling Park	p. 23
John Marshall	p. 10				

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Barnesville Shamrocks Head coach: Katy Plumly

Shamrocks cheering likes to stick with the basics according to coach Katy Plumly. Instead of focusing on competitions, they prefer to give it their all in cheering for Barnesville's various sports teams.

That said, OVACs are the one thing they do entirely for themselves. And this year they'll bring a 14-girl squad to the 3A division of the championship competition. That includes 12 cheerleaders and two alternates.

"We were second to last," Plumly said of last year's showing. "We're hoping to do better this year. The girls' goal is to get a trophy. If they come in fifth, they'll probably scream louder than the girls who win first place."

This year's squad consists of seniors Lauren Ebeling, Madison Neiswonger and Ella Carpenter; juniors Sydney Baum, Brianna Leach and Emmy Carpenter; sophomores Kiley Ciroli, Hannah Burkhardt, Cara Singleton, Morgan Burghy and Ashley Nelson; and freshmen Pazeley Crum, Carli Ebright and Hannah Baker.

So far injuries have not been a factor, Plumly said. She's jokingly warned her



girls to avoid sled riding and auto accidents.

This year's OVAC routine is fun, fast-paced and includes a lot of input from the girls themselves. It was designed by St. Clairsville-based choreographer Shannon Dombroski.

"We really shine in our cheer in my opinion," Plumly said.

"We lack in tumbling. We only have five or six tumblers. Which on a squad of 14 is not that good of a percentage. But

we're trying to make do with what we have."

Plumly cheered in high school, graduated in 2010, and has coached cheering at Barnesville for the past four years. This is her first year as head coach.

It's been more challenging than she thought it would be, but she's received plenty of help from her squad and the cheering moms.

"They keep me on track with what needs to be done and when," she said.

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bellaire Big Reds Head coach: Ann Arno

When the last Big Reds cheering coach left for another school district, the Bellaire High School athletic director tapped Ann Arno to take over the program this past November. The 1993 Bellaire graduate never cheered, but instead brought her knowledge of basketball, track and cross country workouts to her new post.

"Basically these girls have never had physical workouts other than basic cheering practices," said the registered nurse. "Now we're doing cardio workouts and lots of weightlifting. I'm getting them stronger. Having them take tumbling classes. And we're coming together as a group doing team-building activities."

In short, it's all about making them stronger and better Arno said. Having a daughter cheer for Bellaire a few years ago introduced her to the sport. And the girls on the squad have made her new gig easy, she said.

"They've been open to doing new workouts and new strategies," she said. "And that's made it a lot easier on me."

This year's Bellaire Big Reds compe-



tion squad consists of seniors Kaitlyn Callarik, Markiah Peltz, Taylor Scott, Kaisha Violet; juniors Makenna Berka, Ashlie Conner, Megan McCarthy, Sailor Myers, Rylie Purتمان; and sophomores Alexis Bell, Hannah D'Aquila, Dawnell Ticarich.

In the leadup to the OVAC Cheering Championship, the squad is practicing six days a week, two to three hours a day. Two to three hours a day. Their regimen includes 250 crunches three times per week.

"With all the tumbling they do, their

cores need to be strong," Arno said.

Last year the Big Reds cheering squad placed third in 3A competition at the OVACS, and the team is looking to improve.

Choreographer Joey Takacs is helping them achieve their goals with the perfect routine.

"Compared to last year, it's more dancey," he said.

"I told them I was going to give them something they could really work with. And it's a routine they can really get into."

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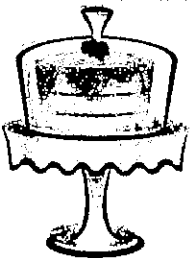
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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bishop Donahue Head coach: Dana Mele

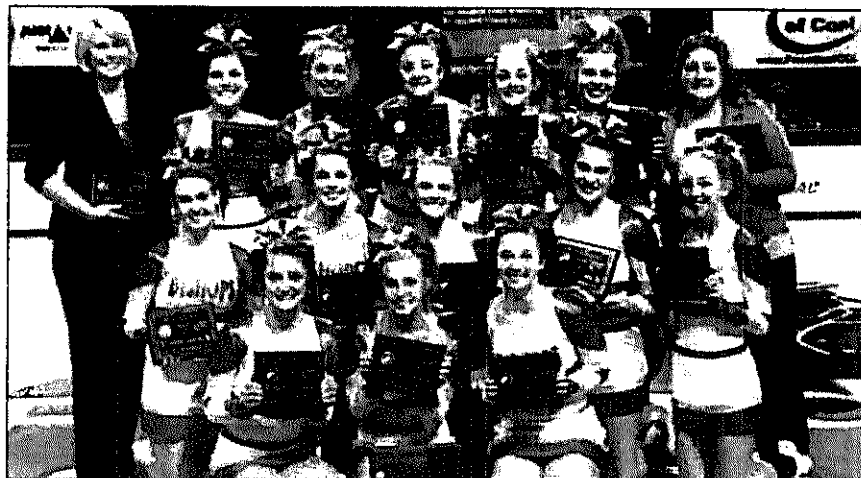
Tiny Bishop Donahue won out at regionals this year, and was runner up in 1A competition at states, much to the delight of head coach Dana Mele. Now she and her 13-girl competition squad have their sights set on capturing a fifth consecutive OVAC title.

"We're hoping for one for the thumb," she said, echoing the rallying cry of Steelers fans prior to Super Bowl XL.

The Bishops cheering machine consists of Mele at the helm, her assistant Katrina Bonar, and choreographer extraordinaire Joey Takacs.

"This is my sixth year of coaching," Mele said. "I cheered in high school at Wheeling Central. And two of my three daughters cheered. That's what got me into it."

The competition squad this year consists of seniors Abbey Mele, Sommer South and Shelby Davis; juniors Jen Richmond, Josie Bonar, Elizabeth Smith, Megan Stout and Maddie Kellar; sophomores Sophia Gretchen, Caroline Brunan, Melissa O'Kelley and Lauren Bonar; and freshman Danielle Ferrera.



"We start in August and practice until the night before OVACs," Mele said. "Five to six days a week."

She said the talent she has to work with is rare for a 1A school. And that a lot of her girls have been involved in cheering or dance since they were 4 years old, which makes for a long road to becoming a high school cheerleader. Oh, and they're smart too.

"I don't think there's a girl on my squad below a 3.6," Mele said. One of

my seniors is the valedictorian and the other is in the top five in her class. It's an intelligent group."

Perhaps the best part of Bishop cheering, Mele said, is the sense of camaraderie. The girls often stop by her house after school just to hang out.

"We always have our team meals, and movie nights. I'll have 13 girls spend the night. That says a lot when you can get 13 girls together and there's no drama," she said.



**Good Luck John Marshall,
Bishop Donahue & Cameron**

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bridgeport Bulldogs Head coach: Mallory Cooper

When it comes to competition, the singular focus of Bridgeport cheering coach Mallory Cooper is the OVAC Cheering Championship, though she's looking to change that.

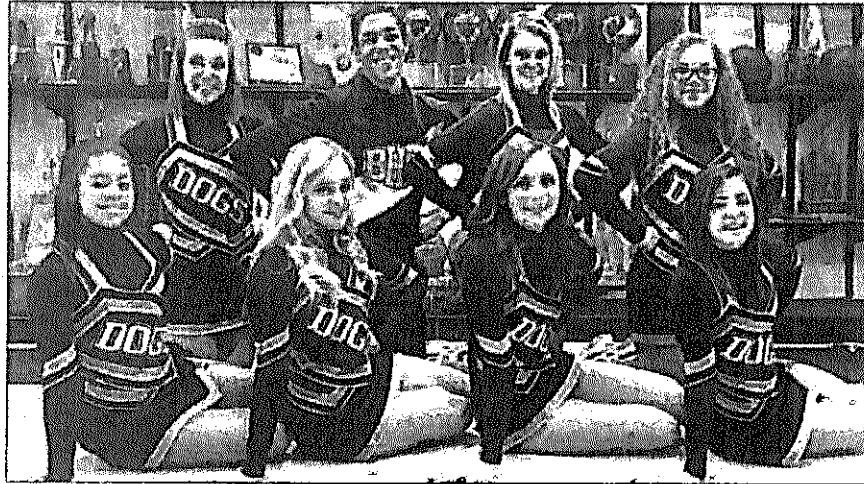
"That's really the only competition around here," said the new Bulldogs coach. "Next year they're going to start doing regionals and states."

Cooper cheered at St. Clairsville High School, graduating in 2009. She coached for a couple of years at Bellaire St. John before quitting to go back to school. Though she's still taking classes at Ohio University Eastern, she's back to doing what she loves.

"Cheering is my life," she said.

Her Bulldogs squad came in fifth place last year in 2A competition at OVACs, so she has her work cut out for her. That combined with the fact that she only has seven cheerleaders on her competition squad.

Seniors this year are Lexie Willoughby and Kyle Lindsey. The lone junior is Jasmine Rodgers. And the four sopho-



mores are Julia Starkey, MaryJane Williams, Vetra Foster and Mackenzie Hammer.

"We go every day for two hours," she said. "Sometimes even three hours a day. We just practiced now and now we have to go to a game."

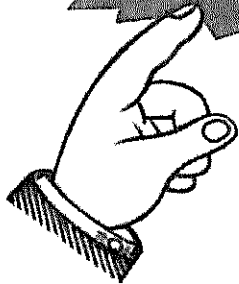
The Bulldogs cheerleaders are working with St. Clairsville-based choreographer Alex Mitchell, and old friend of Mallory Cooper who previously coached a dance team in Akron.

"It's gonna be different from what we've ever done," Cooper said of her squad's OVAC routine. "We are doing our pom part at the beginning, which a lot of people don't do that. But we have some good, upbeat songs. It's really all upbeat. And we have good tumbling this year."

Cooper said that 2016 is the year that her squad wants it the most. They're gunning for first place but would be happy with a top-three showing she said.

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Cameron Dragons Head coach: Bethany Scott

Don't let their numbers fool you, said Cameron High School cheering coach Bethany Scott. She thinks her six-girl squad has some of the best tumblers in the Ohio Valley.

"I'm sure we have one of the smallest squads," said the first year head coach. "But we're used to being a small school. There's no strategy. It's just a matter of having the girls work every day. They take tumbling on their own time."

Scott works closely with assistant Janet Pettit and the two of them divide the coaching responsibilities equally. Pettit is more technically-minded, with a focus on correct motions. While Scott takes charge of the makeup of the routine.

Cameron comes into the OVACS after having competed at the WVSSAC Region I competition at East Fairmont in November of last year. They're down two from that eight-person squad.

Seniors include captain Maddie Ross, Cara Martin and Alexis Booth. The lone junior is Ashley Ruza. Sarah Norris is the only sophomore. And Kenzie Ross is the only freshman.

Scott cheered at Cameron High School

and graduated in 1999. She cheered for two years at the collegiate level at West Liberty University. She then spent five years coaching as an assistant and just this year, took the reins of the program.

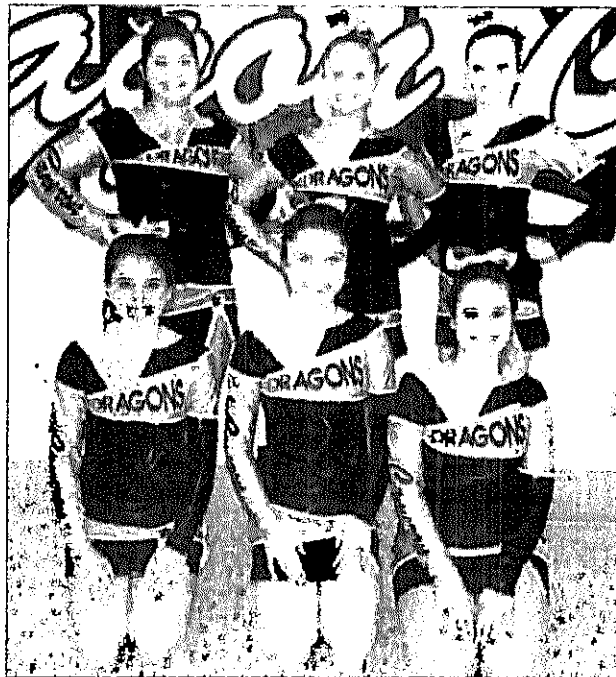
"The transition has been easy," she said. "My best friend was the coach before me and we shared all the responsibilities. And Cameron is a small community so I know most of the girls and their parents."

Cameron is unique in that one of its own cheerleaders makes up their competition routine.

Senior Maddie Ross — whose mother owns Arielettes Dance on W.Va. 88 in Marshall County — has done it for the past three years, saving the team a con-

siderable amount of money.

"It's entertaining with lots of tumbling," Scott said. "With only six girls, we do as much tumbling as we can to get our points higher."




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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Conotton Valley Rockets Head coach: Janelle Cline

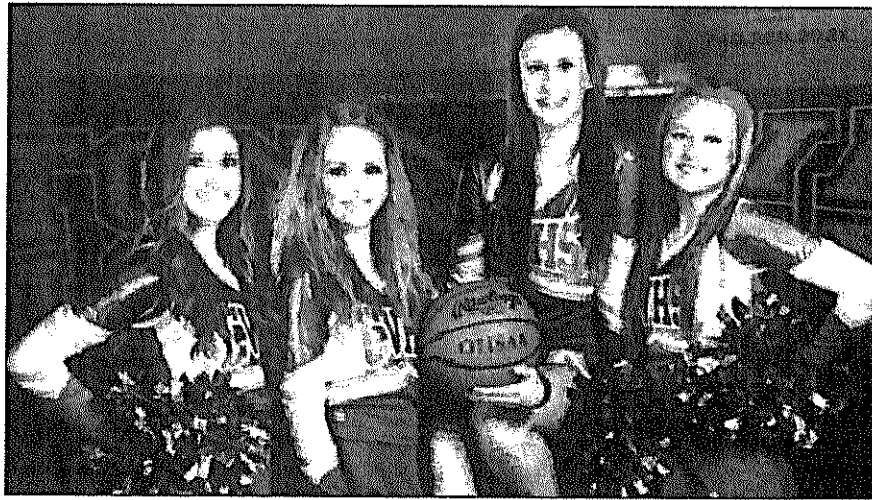
How do you compete at the OVAC Cheering Championship with only four cheerleaders? For Conotton Valley Coach Janelle Cline, it all comes down to one word – ripples.

“We do a lot of ripples,” she said. “Every count in an eight-count has movement. We don’t slow down. I love this squad. They’ve been cheering since PeeWee days in second grade. We seem to make it work and we’re really excited about this year.”

The Rockets competition squad consists of seniors Mikaela Manbeck and Michaela Westfall, and juniors Brooke Reichman and Tanika Yonick.

Cline said at times she wishes she had help. But when it comes to a small school, you deal with what you have. Even if that includes making up your own competition routine.

“I would describe it as very fresh,” she said of the OVAC routine. “Not like what we did last year. It was very strict last year, proper. Not that this year that



we’re doing improper things. But it’s fun and the girls like the routine. I came up with it, and I’m no choreographer.”

Cline only has two girls who tumble. The non-tumblers contribute with cart-wheels and rolls.

“We’re practicing about four hours a week for the competition, tweaking the routine, working on jumps. We’re more prepared this year than we were last year,” she said.

Cline’s fervent wish is for more than just four sets of parents to show up in the Rockets cheering section at WesBanco Arena.

“I don’t think the parents realize how much the cheerleaders do for the boys and the school,” she said. “I’d like a good crowd, so when the girls go on the floor, they have people from their hometown cheering for them no matter what place they get.”

Harrison Central Huskies Head coach: Terra Frye

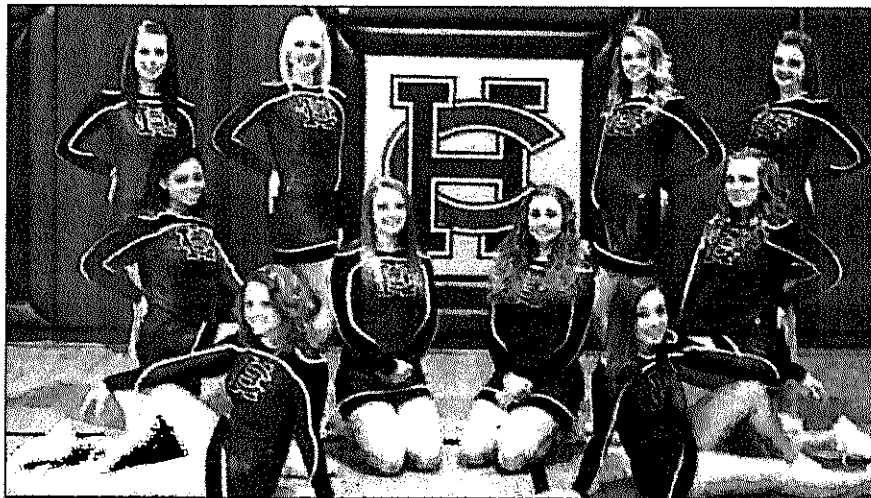
Harrison Central High School’s varsity cheering squad has been busy. The squad, coached by Terra Frye and her assistant, Cindy Elliott, started their season competing at the Kennywood competition in Pittsburgh. The squad placed first there as well as at the Buckeye competition.

“We have a wonderful group of girls this year. They are a very talented group of cheerleaders,” Frye said.

The 2016 squad includes, Sara Bethel, Kayla Smith, Karli Ray, Kali Carter, Reanne Brooks, Alivia Frye, Balie Ray, Carlee Bailey, Cierra Frye and Bre Edwards.

The squad works hard to craft its routine, but also has found time to take part in community events includes a 5K and Pink Out game benefiting the American Cancer Society.

The girls also have participated at the local library’s youth summer reading program, and hosted a community spirit



bonfire supporting the Huskies’ football team.

They also lobbied and received public support for the their school district’s levy for the new school.

“We want to thank our school district for the support they have shown all our girls. We also would like to thank our parents club for being involved and giving up a lot of their time. They al-

ways get what our girls need and its greatly appreciated,” Frye said.

Frye said the squad is looking forward to competing at the OVACS as well as the Ohio State University Cheerleaders’ Competition on Jan. 31, and other regional and state competitions.

“It’s been a great year and a privilege coaching them,” Frye added.

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Indian Creek Redskins Head coach: Gina Giuliani

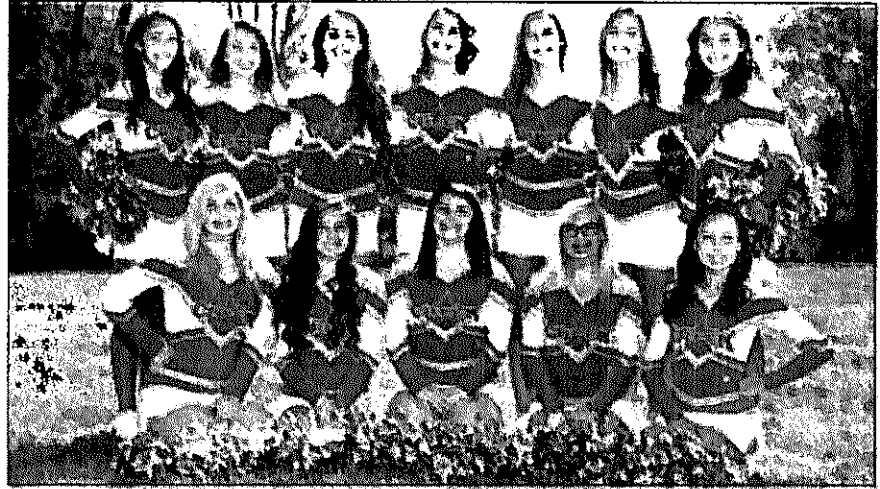
Indian Creek cheering coach Gina Giuliani is one of the few OVAC coaches who cheered for an NCAA Division I college. She cheered her freshman year at the University of Akron after cheering all through high school at Steubenville Catholic Central.

She's been with Indian Creek for five years now, though this is her fourth year as head coach. She works with an assistant, Lisa Fithen, as well as famed local choreographer Joey Takacs.

"We're looking good," she said of her competition squad. "We have a very young squad, so I think we'll grow in the next couple of years."

Indeed, the Redskins have two freshmen — Savannah Tilton and Chelsea Connor — and 10 sophomores — Miah Thompson, Cheyenne Shrieve, Addy Trice, Paige Hilderbrand, LeeAnna Leone, Savannah Pavlic, Shayna Davis, Kelsey Lewis, Marlana Rees and Julia Holman.

So far they've competed at the Jefferson County Fair, the Buckeye 8, and "Cheer for a Cure." Though they're rar-



ing to go in the 4A competition at the OVAC Cheering Championship. Dropping down from 5A last year because of a decline in enrollment.

"And that's the hard part, fluctuating between divisions," Giuliani said. "It changes who you're up against competition-wise."

Takacs said that he's worked with Indian Creek since June and that they're a talented group of girls. Though 4A is going to be a battle this year.

"It's going to be a close call," he said. "Everybody is a contender."

Coach Giuliani just wants to make sure there's a sizable contingent from the Indian Creek family at WesBanco Arena on Feb. 6.

"These girls will be the same team that they'll see for three years," she said. "So the bigger the fan base that we can build to support these girls, the better. They're great girls, young girls, good attitudes, always trying to be better."

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

John Marshall Monarchs Head coach: Marcia Robbins



John Marshall High School cheerleaders have a heart, according to head coach Marcie Robbins.

This past fall the girls heard that there was a fundraiser being held to support Moundsville Middle School student Isaiah Leasure. And so they asked if they could participate in the inaugural "Hero 5K."

"Some of them tumbled across the finish line," Robbins said. "That was really cute. They ran 5 kilometers and then they practiced for two hours right afterward."

Monarchs cheering is down to eight members for this year's OVAC squad. Which is on the smaller side for a 5A school. Several members of last year's squad dropped out to focus on school work and family, Robbins said. Injuries took their toll as well. But

with the help of assistant Kelly Simms, she's soldiering on.

"Kelly is a former cheerleader of mine," Robbins said. "She graduated in 2011 and cheered one of the years that John Marshall won runner up at the OVACs. We coach in tandem and it works really well. We complement each other."

The competition squad consists of seniors Carli Whorton and Cassidy Brown. Juniors are Abbey Bauer, Jourdin Yuncke and Alex Huggins. The lone sophomore is Aubree Williams. And the two freshmen are Ashley Wise and Maddie Estep.

"This year's girls are special to me," Robbins said.

"They're such a small team. And a lot of people have been negative toward us because of that, and have low expectations almost. But my girls have kept their chins up and worked hard and put their all into doing this routine. And I think they deserve more re-

spect than they're getting for doing that."

The Monarchs' routine features a good balance of tumbling and dance, Robbins said. And the girls seem to be having fun with it.

"I think it's flashy and really fun," she said.

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Martins Ferry Purple Riders

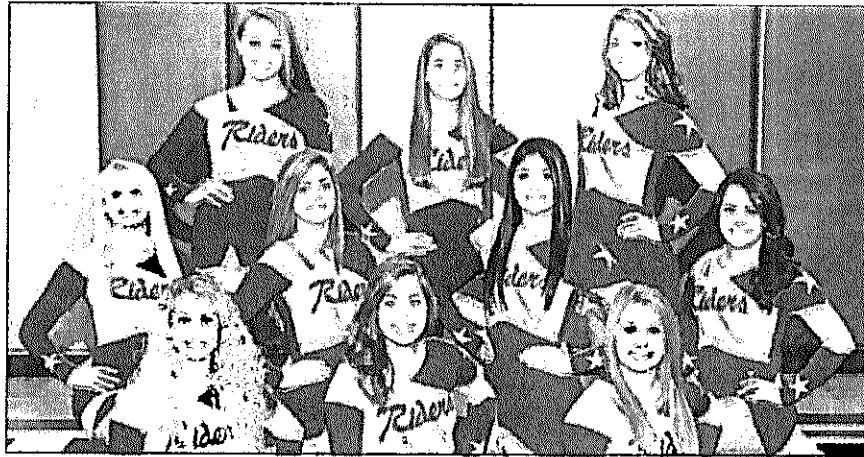
Head coach: Cathy Reuther

It's been since August that the Martins Ferry cheerleaders competed in an event. That was the "Buckeye 8" held at Buckeye Local High School. Head coach Cathy Reuther thought they put in a crackerjack performance.

"The girls did an amazing job with only three weeks of practice," she said. "Some squads we competed against also compete at the Jefferson County Fair, so they had been practicing all summer. This being said, we only missed third place by four and a half points."

Reuther has coached for 11 years and works with assistant Barbie McKeegan. The Purple Riders squad works with choreographer Joey Takacs and last year came in as runners-up in 4A competition at OVACs.

"Our season starts in June and goes through March," Reuther said. "We condition four days a week throughout the summer. For the competition girls, we practice whenever the gym is available — every Sunday and after home basketball games, as well as a few Saturdays.



The girls get together every Wednesday for tumbling."

This year's competition squad consists of seniors Jenn Reuther, Kenzie Reeb and Cassie Berisford; juniors Megan Edwards, Kaitlen Hood, Carly McKeegan and Peightyn Bumbico; sophomore Sami Eimer; and freshmen Abby Bumbico, Alyssa Brady and Erica Doyle.

The girls learned the final 40 seconds of their routine with less than a month to go before OVACs Reuther said. They still have work to do. But they'll be ready

to go come Feb. 6.

"I have never worked with a group of girls who pick up so quickly as this group has," she said. "They work very well together and critique each other to make themselves better."

Takacs said that he's worked with Ferry for four years now and that they come to his Pittsburgh Superstars gym for tumbling.

"They'll definitely be a contender in 4A," he said. "It's a good team and they're a good group of girls."

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Oak Glen Golden Bears Head coach: Debbie Fish

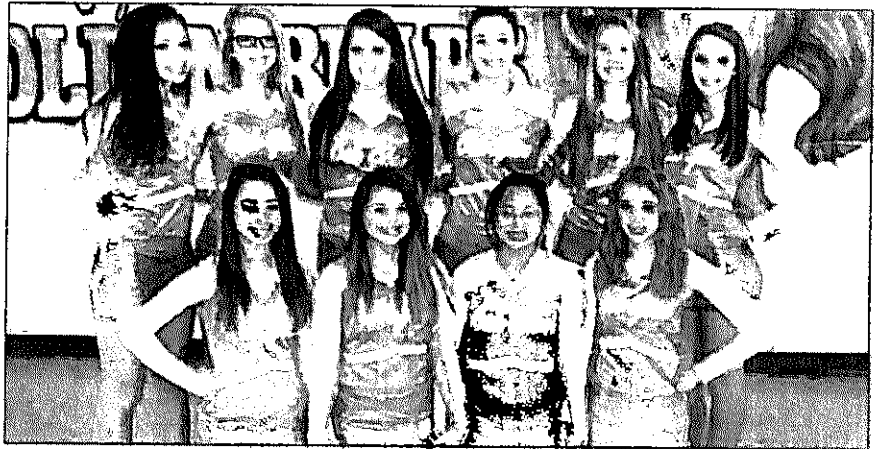
Just how committed are the Oak Glen Golden Bears cheerleaders to performing their best? That most of the squad drives nearly 70 miles roundtrip every Wednesday to practice tumbling at Joey Takacs' Wheeling gym says it all.

"It's a very dedicated group of girls," Takacs said. "And it's very hard to find that."

The owner of the local Pittsburgh Superstars cheering gym said he's worked with Oak Glen for six years. And that last year was the most talented team he saw come out of New Cumberland. But he did use some seniors. That said, he's still optimistic. "Usually when I go into Oak Glen, I 'free-for-all' it," Takacs said. Make it up on the spot. And this year came together really well.

The girls certainly put in the time. Head coach Debbie Fish said they practice eight to 10 hours per week. Not including their mid-week jaunt to Wheeling. And that the season stretches from August to the end of basketball season in March.

"It's a long season," Fish said. "After



regionals they take a week off. I try not to do weekends unless we're close to competition. I try to give them as many breaks as possible. Team bonding things they do include watching old regionals tapes, get together and tie dye T-shirts, spend the night at each other's houses as a group."

The competition squad is made up of juniors Jocelyn Nolder, Autumn Owen, Mackenzie Bailey, and Alexandra Burchett; sophomores Lauren Mahan, and Britney Jackson; and freshmen Sierra

Lonkert, Holly Ellis, Melena Mueller, Jennifer Weltner.

Fish said her squad has been blessed by a lack of serious injuries this year. And that she's looking forward to an OVAC routine that's faster than what her squad has done in years past.

"The girls have more tumbling than last year," she said.

"That, combined with the quickness of the routine, means they need to get their cardio in so they can blast through the routine."

Paden City Wildcats Head coach: Kimberly Hizer

As one of the smallest schools in the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference, Paden City has to make do according to Athletic Director Fred King, even if that means sharing.

"Volleyball this year shared six cheerleaders," he said. "Basketball this year shares four. Down through the years, Paden City has had success with varying athletes. A lot of schools don't buy into this, but when you're as small as we are, it's every man and woman on board."

He pointed out that Paden City cheering has a long tradition of success with no fewer than 12 OVAC championships and two state titles in 1994 and 1998 respectively.

Head cheering coach Kimberly Hizer, hoping she can add to Paden City cheering's accomplishments. This February she will take a competition squad of nine girls to compete at WesBanco Arena.

"Our music is fast and it's a cute routine," she said. "Our choreographer

does an excellent job. The girls are working hard to get it cleaned up and ready."

This year's Wildcats cheering squad consists of seniors Desiree Heasley and Cheyenne Blizzard; junior Kallie Arnett; sophomores Jenna Arnett, Katrina Heasley, Malayna Price, Kacie Hartwig and Caitlin Stewart; and freshman Paige Leonard.

Hizer has been at the helm of Paden City cheering for three years now. She works with choreographer Ryan DeMary out of Fairmont. And last year her Wildcats came in third place in 1A competition at OVACs.

"Paden City always has a wonderful group of girls," Hizer said. "They're just sweet. Everyone thought I'd quit coaching when my daughter got



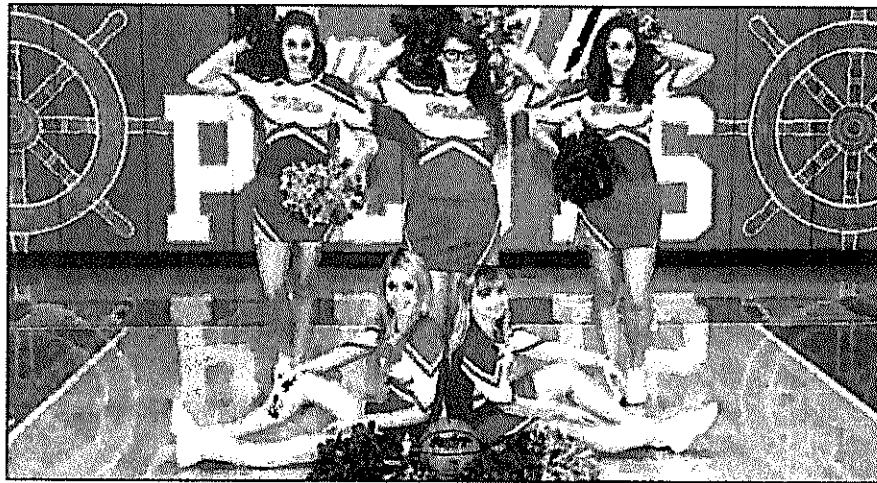
through. But I love these girls. They have a great attitude, and not a lot of drama. They're great to work with."

Amazingly, the girls are all friends outside of cheering. They like to go ice skating together and make trips to the mall during their time off.

"It's like a family," Hizer said.

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

River Pilots Head coach: Stephanie Schaffner



Digging in for some serious practice time, the squad spends two hours a day after school honing its routine. Schaffner said practice time also emphasizes the importance of stretching as well as the dance portion of their competition routine.

"We are a small squad but the girls seem to like to be together," she said. "So I think that makes them special. They spend a lot of time together and get along well. We have a really good captain in senior Chelsea Pandzik. They really listen

to her and look for guidance."

Schaffner also has done double duty as an assistant track coach at River and continues in that role this school year.

She said she learned some good advice about coaching cheerleaders from her mother, who was a coach as well.

"The OVACs are all new to me," Schaffner said.

"We are still working on our routine for the competition, making sure everything fits."

Most schools see working with a smaller cheerleading squad as a challenge. River coach Stephanie Schaffner sees it as a chance to showcase her girls' individual talents. It's that scrappy spirit that characterizes Pilots cheering.

"We will feature each girl at what they are good at," Schaffner said. "I'm excited to do this."

On Feb. 6, River fans who make the trip to WesBanco Arena in Wheeling will see sophomores Alyson Johnson, Abbie Rufeber, Alexis White, Karigan Pfalzgraf, and lone senior Chelsea Pandzik take the floor.

Schaffner — who cheered as a grade schooler and into junior high — chose to focus on dance in her high school years, which she views as a plus when leading a cheering squad to a winning routine in competition.

"We have not gone to any other competitions this year," she said, "as we just ended the football season and now there is basketball. But we are focusing on the OVACs."

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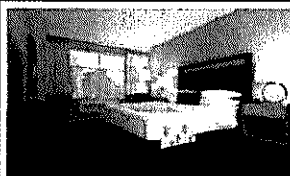
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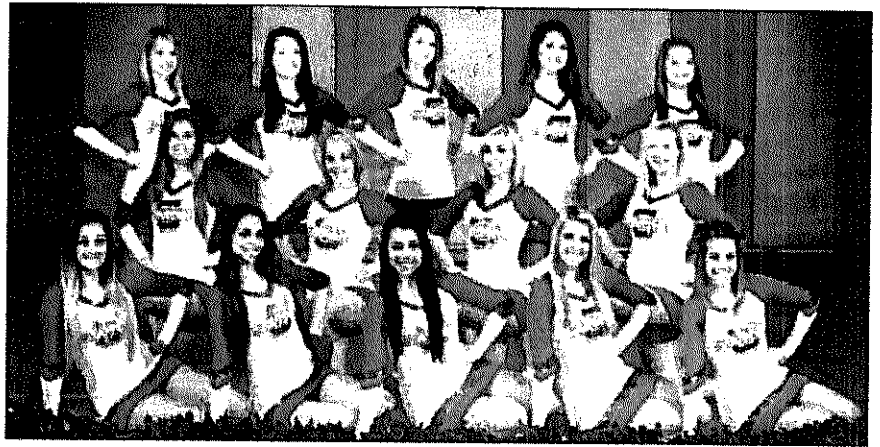
St. Clairsville Red Devils Head coach: Shawn Tomlan

Shawn Tomlan runs a tight ship. A cheering coach has to in order to be in first place *eight consecutive* years in the talent-rich 4A division of the OVAC Cheering Championship. That said, she's not so focused on winning that she fails to teach her cheerleaders good sportsmanship. Or that some things are more important than winning.

"They are very nice girls," she said of her squad this year.

"We try to find time away from practice to do some community service. We've worked with the Relay For Life walk-in-the-dark race in St. Clairsville several years. We decorate our city every year. And this year we sold breast cancer awareness shirts and made a \$1,000 donation to the Judy Vincenzo Foundation."

This year's squad consists of seniors Jas DeLong, Kaylie Kindler and Alyssa Westlake; juniors Alyssa Miller, Jennifer Mazgaj and Cassidy Life; sophomores Caton Kadylak,



Paige McGlothlin and Jessica Waggle; and freshmen Emily Baire, Grace Heath, Maddie Kleinendorst, Hailey McCort and Alexa Shields.

Cheering is a year-round commitment in St. Clairsville, according to Tomlan. Formal practices start in July and go all the way through March.

With various commitments in the off season, this time of year the Red Devils are practicing about 12 hours a week.

"They're attempting a difficult routine this year, Tomlan said. More tumbling than usual, and the cheer will incorporate

several youthful slang words that were previously unknown to her.

"I was asking our choreographer, 'What are they saying?' I had to come home and Google 'flek.' Apparently 'on fleek' is a thing."

Despite the young squad and all the changes, St. Clairsville is going to be ready come Feb. 6.

"We're going to give 100 percent no matter what," Tomlan said.

"We have an entertaining routine. And it's just one time a year that the cheerleaders get support."

Good Luck All Area Teams!



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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

St. John Central Fighting Irish Head coach: Doris Gordon

Last year's fourth place finish in the 1A division of the OVAC Championship didn't sit well with St. John cheering coach Doris Gordon.

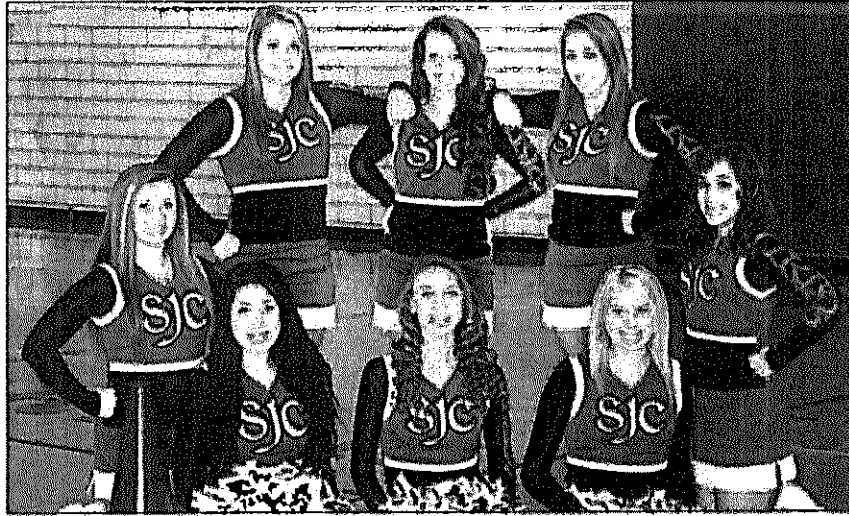
"We would have preferred a higher place," she said. "But maybe that's making us work harder this year to get at least third place. I guess that's our motivation for this year."

The squad just recently finished its routine with the help of local choreographer Joey Takacs, and is working on the final parts and remaining places that need improved.

"But that will come in time," Gordon said. "I think they'll have it in the next couple of weeks."

During the season the girls are practicing six to eight hours per week. The bulk of their practice time takes place during four-hour practices on Sundays.

This year's Fighting Irish will feature senior co-captains Ashlyn Callarick and Charlie Scatterday as well as senior Maria Ducci. Juniors are Allyson Goelan, Kate Lovinski and Taylor Lowe. There



are no sophomores and the two freshmen are Katherine Eberhart and Bradie Ramsay.

"Smaller groups are harder, 100 percent. It makes a difference, especially during the cheer portion. Those eight girls really have to yell as loud as they can to beat a squad with 15 girls. All of them have to be perfect; on point."

On a more positive note, Takacs said that he's been to St. John's practices, he's

heard them yell, and thinks they're up to the challenge. And that they do very well with what they have, sentiments echoed by Gordon.

"The girls work really hard and are dedicated to cheering," she said.

"And this is their moment to shine. I think that, for that reason, people should come and see what all goes into this. They deserve to be out there and they put on a good show."

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Shadyside Tigers Head coach: Melanie Haswell

Shadyside Coach Melanie Haswell is fond of saying that cheering is in her blood. She's been involved in the sport off and on — for 28 years, and now her daughter Victoria Haswell is now on the squad to soak up that knowledge.

"I'm not sure if she likes my being a cheerleader," Haswell said.

"You're always rougher on your own. I'm going to hang in there for a few more years to get her through."

An interesting twist, Haswell is making use of The Linsly School's cheering coach — Megan Caruso — to make up this year's OVAC competition routine. "We've never done this before," Haswell said. "It's something different. She's done some of our summer camps. She's easy going and she listens."

This year's Tigers competition squad consists of senior captains McKayla Emond and Paige Heller; senior Ash-Kropka; juniors Sidney Wolgemuth, Ben Bizzari, Lyndsey Howell, Pami



Contraguerra, Karly Klug, Alexa Coggins and Julce Schuetz; sophomores Mackenzie Darrah and Julia Weeks; and freshmen Victoria Haswell, Desirae Harris and Tara Palmer.

The girls start practice in the third week of June and practice three days a week until the start of football season. The competition squad starts practicing in earnest for the OVACs starting in October. Sometimes they have to wait until after 8 p.m. to get gym time.

"Cheerleading is not considered a sport

in Ohio," Haswell said. "But you can see what these girls do with their bodies. They're obviously in shape to do these things."

Injuries have not been a factor for the Tigers so far this year.

And Haswell has high hopes for this year's OVAC competition.

"I can just tell that this is the year we can make things happen," she said.

"I just see that spark in their eye and I see how hard they work during practice. Hopefully this is going to be the year."

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Shenandoah Zeps

Head coach: April Giesey

April Giesey may be the only cheering coach at this year's OVACs with not one, but two daughters on her squad.

"Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not," she said with a laugh. "They argue with each other."

Sibling rivalry aside, Giesey said her squad is performing well, despite their age and lack of competition experience.

"I have a young squad," she said. "And as far as competitions go, none of them have performed at OVACs. Not even my senior. So I guess work-ethic wise, they're learning how to work together. It's been a growing experience for all of them. As we build on that, it will get better."

This year's Zeps include senior Kimberly West; sophomores Cheyenne Giesey and Gabby Miller; and freshmen Savannah Giesey, Jessica Merrill, Taylor Wukelich, Kaleigh Ramage and Erica Cantwell.

Each member of her competition squad cheered for football and basketball this school year, Giesey said. And their com-

mitment to cheering is pretty much year-round, considering that tryouts were at the end of May last year.

They learned their competition routine at the beginning of November.

"We've been practicing that for two to four hours a week," she said.

"On top of basketball games. Some weeks they're at it every night of the week and Saturdays."

Giesey is the only coach, which is not uncommon for a small school. But there are times when she needs help, she said. She likes to make use of friends to round out her weaknesses.

"I have someone come in and do tumbling," she said.

"And I had a choreographer come in as



well. I draw from various friends who have been cheer coaches and dance coaches. They'll come and watch the routine and tell me what they think, see what I'm not seeing."

As for OVACs, the Zeps are excited and working hard.

"I hope their enthusiasm and commitment to practice shows on the floor," Giesey said.

Staubenville Catholic Central Crusaders

Head coach: Pam Bolger

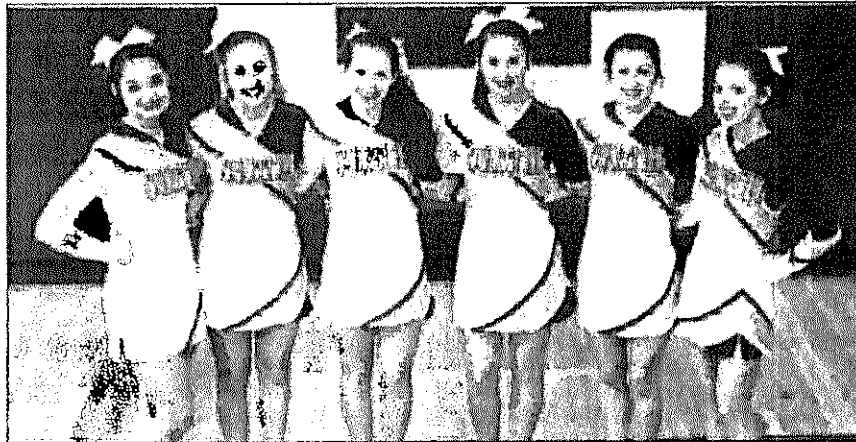
Staubenville Catholic Central will take the floor at this year's OVAC Cheering Championship with only a six-member squad.

"It's harder with fewer," Coach Pam Bolger said with a laugh. "My assistant Megan Green and I are both former gymnasts. Between the two of us we're able to tweak things. We'll make it work."

Crusader cheering has faced a war of attrition, starting with 15 cheerleaders for football season, down to 10 for basketball, with only six being able to commit to OVACs. But the remaining girls are solid, Bolger said.

"So of the six I have, five are freshmen," she said. Most of them were with me last year as Junior Crusaders. So they know my expectations. They're so dedicated. And I have some strong tumblers, of which I'm glad."

Those freshmen are Karly Bolger, Tafia DiBiase, Caitlin Pipo, Olivia Shepherd, Ava Sprochi. And the lone sophomore is Emily Hemon.



The defining characteristic of her cheerleaders is a willingness to learn, Bolger said. Sometimes she'll teach them a cheer five minutes before the start of a game. Which plays into her strategy for the Crusaders' OVAC competition routine.

"From the last competition that Megan and I went to, we noticed that a lot of the routines are the same," she said. "Not the routines, but the order in which they do the events. So our goal was to really mix it up."

Bolger and Green both know the girls' strengths inside and out since they've been with them the entire school year.

"Cheering is such a huge commitment," Bolger said. "It's not like football season and it's done. I have tryouts in May. They condition all summer. And we pretty much end in March."

She's hoping for a lot of fan support for her Crusader cheerleaders this Feb. 6

"This being the first time we're in OVACs for several years, it would truly be appreciated," Bolger said.

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Steubenville Big Red Head coach: Kelly Lancia

Steubenville High School cheerleaders love the dance portion of their routine, according to head coach Kelly Lancia.

"They have a lot of fun with it," she said.

The Big Red competition squad has had to undergo significant changes from the beginning of the season, when it enjoyed 13 members.

"We were down four upperclassmen who are unable to perform at OVACs," Lancia said.

"So we picked up two alternates who did not compete with us in the summer. There have been many formation changes and girls learning new routines."

This year's competition squad consists of seniors Samantha McDonald, Britlynn Wineman, Chaeli Cooper; juniors Jordie Ferguson, Kylee Taylor, Allyory Mettenberger and Launastasis Frick; sophomore Jalen Byrom; and freshmen T'Kayla Kelley, Jordan Rgeant and Gabrielle Lulla.

"We have a lot of heart on our



team," Lancia said. "No matter all of the changes, and missing some of our strong upperclassmen for the OVACs, the rest of the team is still pushing through and working as hard as they can to put on a good performance."

She said her squad is practicing three to four times per week for about two and a half hours a practice, depending on gym access.

"We hope Big Red Nation will come support us," Lancia said.

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Toronto Red Knights Head coach: Marissa Rebich

Joey Takacs is to Ohio Valley cheering what Warren Buffet is to value investing, or Stephen Hawking is to theoretical physics.

In short, he's the man.

Eleven teams competing at OVACs this year bear his imprimatur.

But only one team – Toronto – can call him coach. (Well, assistant coach.)

"Marissa Rebich, the head coach, is pregnant," Takacs said.

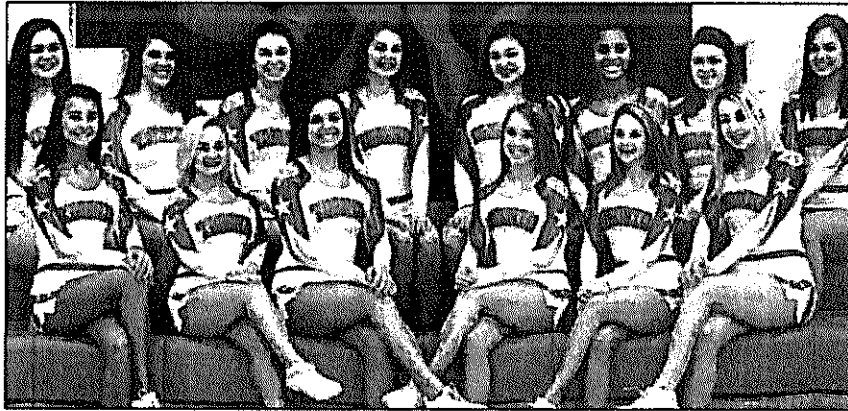
"And she didn't want to compete a lot. And I said that's fine with me because I'm swamped."

Toronto did make time last year for a very competitive Jefferson County Fair competition, which is basically a cheering free-for-all on a slab of cement on a dirt race track.

They came in second place.

And since then they've only gotten better.

"I finished the routine a month ago and we've been running it full out for a solid two weeks now," Takacs said.



"We performed it at a basketball game against Weir High School the other night.

"The other coaches and I looked at each other and said, 'This is really good.'"

This year's Red Knights competition squad consists of seniors Elyse Price and Mollie Chetock; juniors Jazalyn Glenn, Meghan Rawson, Johna Bell, Kara Eltringham, Aubrey Saner and Hannah Parker; sophomore Jenna Leasure; and freshmen Kiara Smith, Khloey Stock, Hollie Robinson, Ashlynn Suppa and Sara Yarosz.

Takacs is the owner of the local Pittsburgh Superstars cheering gym.

And, needless to say, a talented choreographer. But in a surprising move, he enlisted the help of Linsly cheering coach (and good friend) Megan Caruso to design Toronto's OVAC routine.

"It's different," he said.

"Creative. And it's going to catch the eye of the crowd.

"It's one of the best groups I've had in Toronto in five years. The talent level is through the roof. The tumbling pass at the beginning is insane.

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Union Local Jets Head coach: Stephanie Jendrusik

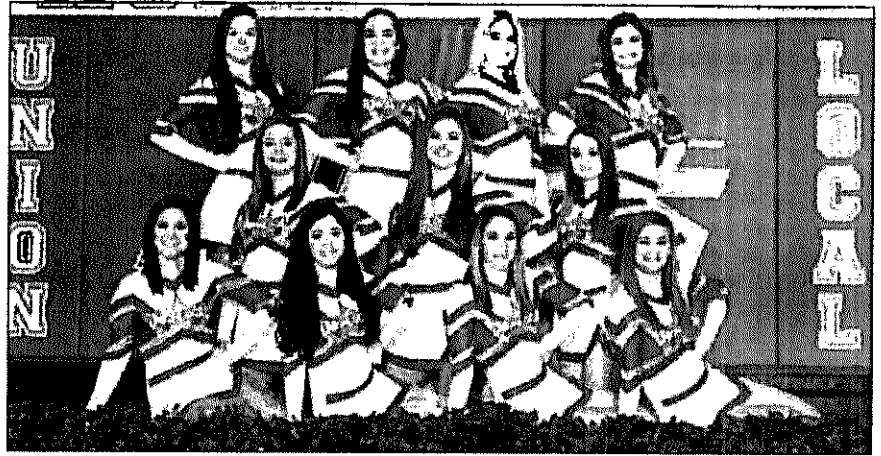
Retirement is overrated, according to Union Local cheering coach Stephanie Jendrusik.

The longtime Jets coach came out of the hibernation last year and will take her squad to the OVAC Championship in February — its first competition since fall's Buckeye 8.

"This has been a big building year to that endurance back," she said. "I've been working since early May, and six days a week. Prior to the Buckeye 8, the girls were doing private training time to build their endurance. And I'm adamant about doing routines full-out in practice."

The Jets will compete in the talent-rich division of the OVAC Championship. Their routine — developed by St. Clairsville choreographers Shannon Domski and Ayla Stewart — is "very fast" "unique," Jendrusik said.

This year's squad consists of Gauge Jello, Autumn Crum, Maddie Dubiel, Britny Hicks, Megan Lattocha, Alyssa



Morris, Alyssa Morrison, Raegen Ricer, Carrigan Sperry, Alaire Vota and Rebekah Whiteley.

"I would have to say that these girls have a drive to win that I've never seen at Union Local," Jendrusik said. "They know hard work and they respect hard work. You can be the best coach in the world. But if they don't have that desire, you're not going to be successful."

Counting her previous stint, this will be her 13th year at the helm of Union Local

cheering. Jendrusik said that part of what she loves about her job is molding young girls during an impressionable time of their lives.

"Getting to work with these young ladies is very fulfilling for me," she said. "I really focus on working with the girls to instill good morals. This is a fun time of their lives. But ultimately, life outside of Union Local is an adventure. And I want to be part of helping prepare them for that."

Weir Red Riders Head coach: Sarah Walter

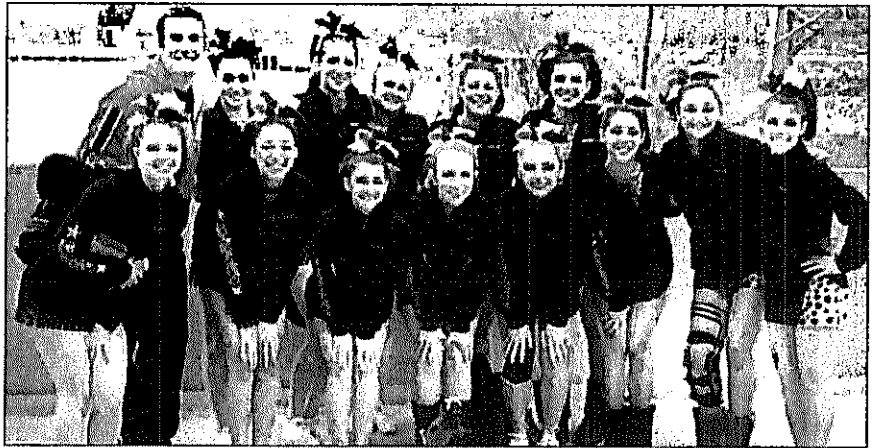
Weir cheering coach Sarah Walter and assistant coach Amy Paul have a system. Their decisions are mutual and they do everything together.

"We're very much a team," said Walter, who cheered for Weir and has coached since 2010.

So far her squad has placed second at WVSSAC Region 1 competition, and it went on to a fourth place finish at the state competition.

"Was I happy?" Walter said. "Absolutely. They worked very hard this year. And we have five seniors and it's their personal goal to finally make it to the state competition. We hadn't been there since 2010. So it was an accomplishment that they worked hard to reach." This year's Red Riders competition squad includes Alayna Degenhardt, Carlee Fodor, Isabella Kirilangitis, Lexusa, Brandon Konovitch, Kenzie Rusich, Allina Varner, Makaila Taylor, Taylor Zdan, Alicia Palmeri, Adriana Diteis, Steffani Cummins, Amelia Cummins, Macey Gump.

Last year the girls came in second



place in 5A competition at the OVAC Cheering Championship. Something they accomplished with the help of choreographer Joey Takacs, who has become such a good friend to Walter that they talk on the phone weekly and email each other videos.

"Weir is very talented this year," Takacs said. "The opening of their routine is very strong. It's very different. The opening is really going to have a 'wow' factor, 100 percent."

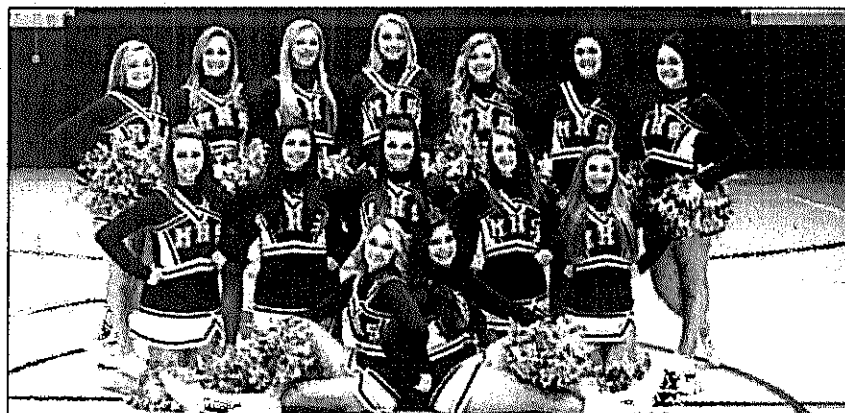
Takacs also said that he was pleased

that Weir made it to the state competition. And that until this year, no school had ever represented his work in the state's penultimate cheering competition. Next up are the OVACs.

"My girls want to win OVACs more than anything," Walter said. "Today there's a snow day and they don't understand why we're not having practice. They want to be in the gym. They're lifting weights. They run stairs. At this point, they would do anything to win their first OVAC title since 2003."

2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Weirton Madonna Head coach: Jennifer Barnabei



Weirton Madonna High School takes a team-oriented approach to coaching its cheerleading squad. Head Coach Jennifer Barnabei works closely with assistants Denise Ceraolo and Danielle Weimer-skirch to hone the competition routine.

"We plan our practices together," Barnabei said.

"And we focus on tumbling and all aspects of our routine. And we really focus on meeting the needs of the girls to help them be successful. We go to all the games and practices together. It's been a really nice collaboration so far this year."

Throw Ohio Valley choreographer extraordinaire Joey Takacs into the mix and you have a recipe for success. Blue Dons style.

"It's a very talented group of young ladies with a lot of untapped potential," Ceraolo said. "They have been working very hard on their OVAC routine along with basketball sideline cheers."

This year's Blue Dons competition squad consists of seniors Gabriella Anile

and Ayla Gobleck; juniors Mallory Santoro and Alexa Kessel; sophomores Hannah Delval, Miah LeFever, Catherine Lis, Allie Morrocco, Tomi Pavan and Halle Payne; and freshmen Alexandra Backel, Aylssa Gobleck, Elle Greco and Abby Nickerson.

Barnabei said that this year's competition routine is action-packed and fun and her girls are really excited about it. "They're enjoying the dance and the cheer portions," she said.

"And they're very much into the gymnastics. I'm proud of the girls for their

hard work in completing this routine. It's going to be exciting for the crowd and rewarding for the girls. We have music mix that encompasses a variety of genres."

One of the things that stands out most for Coach Barnabei is how well her girls work together and support each other.

"They're a respectful group that's proud of what they do," she said.

"And I'm really looking forward to some fantastic results. They're working hard to showcase their skills when they arrive at OVACs."

**GOOD LUCK TO ALL
CHEERING SQUADS!**

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2016 OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Wheeling Park Patriots Head coach: Shawna Shepherd

In her 11 years as head coach of Wheeling Park High School cheering, Shawna Shepherd considers this year to be one of the most eventful.

Lets review: this past fall the football team won its first state championship in school history; the cheering squad took the state competition in Charleston shortly after; and, in her spare time, senior cheerleader Kayley Miller managed to get into Stanford University – a school with a 5.1 percent acceptance rate.

“It’s been a lot of fun to be a Wheeling Park Patriot this year,” Shepherd said. “And honestly, we just have a great group of seniors.”

Wheeling Park will field a 15-girl competition squad this Feb. 6 when then defend their 5A OVAC championship title. Another win would make it four straight for the Patriots.

In addition to Miller are seniors Natalie Wiethe, Taylah Rutherford, Kasie Stewart, Bre Ross and Jordan Stahl; junior Abby Hudriik; sophomores



Meghan Murphy, Abby Skrzypek, and Bria Spigarelli; and freshmen Morgan Fox, Shea Wright, Kyla Leigh, Alexa Crebs and Natalie Fischer.

This year’s OVAC routine was designed by Fairmont-based Brian Faulkner. Shepherd considers it “high endurance” and said her girls will need a lot of stamina to make it through.

“We do opening tumbling,” she said. “And then the girls do their cheer. And the dance is in the second half. But it’s always difficult to step up from last year.


Make the judges remember you. And do something clever that sticks out.”


But cheering is more than winning championships for Shepherd. She organizes different activities throughout the year to keep things fun for her girls. Like “Relay for Life,” and reading to students at local elementary schools. And when graduation day comes, she’s going to miss her seniors.

“When you spend six days a week practicing on top of school,” she said. “You really do become a family.”

**Good Luck
Wheeling Park Cheering**

GO PARK!





**Wheeling Park
Athletic
Department**

Ohio County Schools

Inspiring Dreams

Go Patriots!

Wheeling Park High School offers 20 varsity sports and 3 club sports.

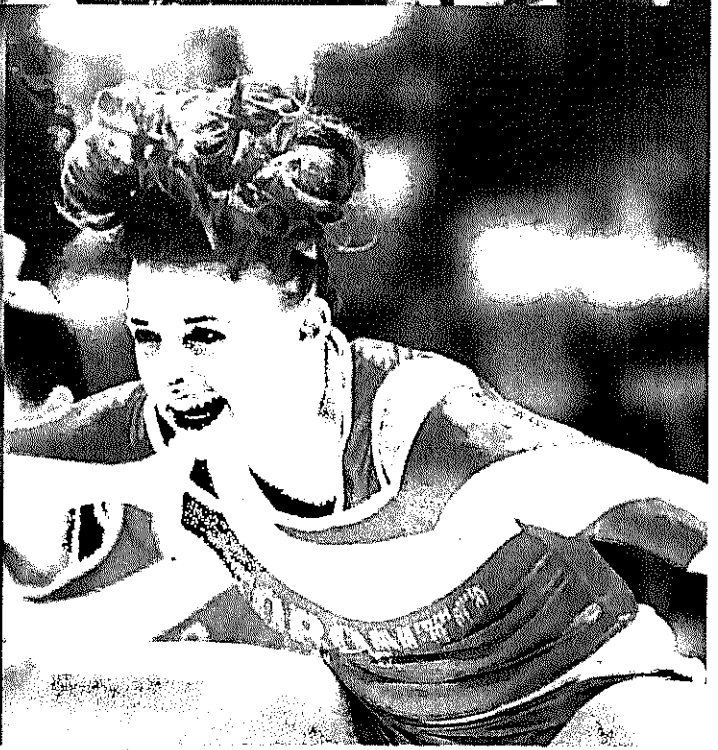
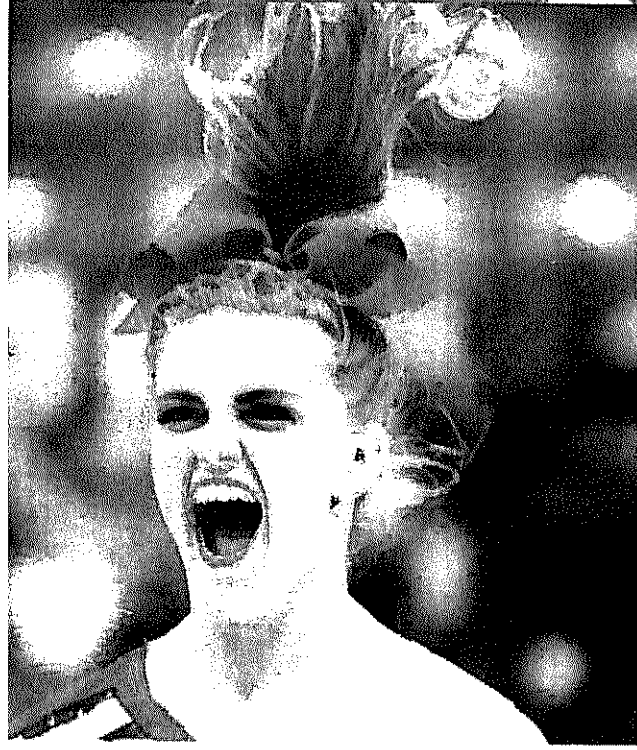
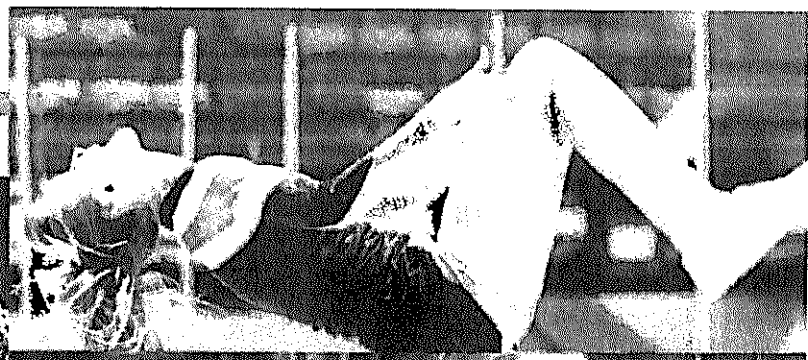
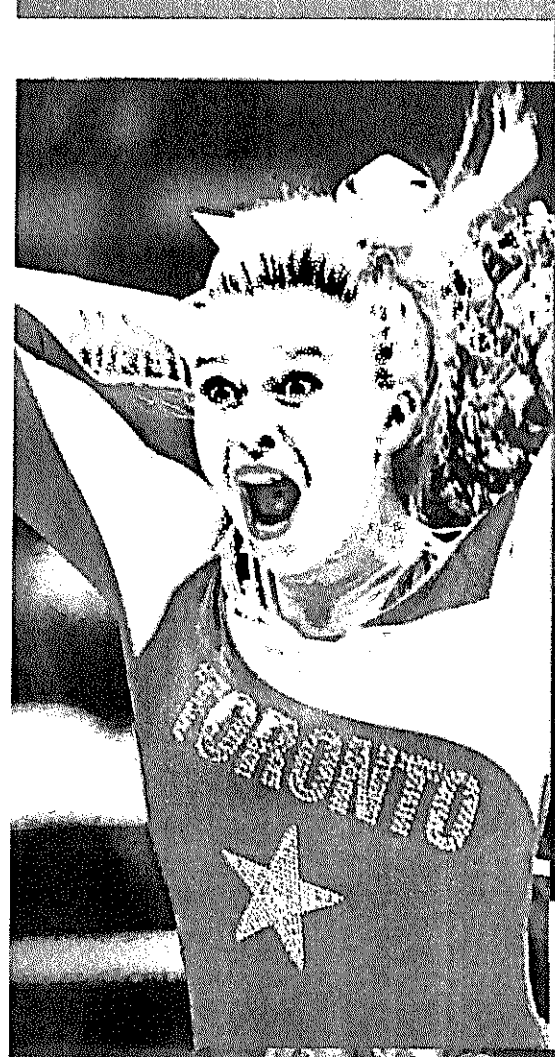
Boys’ sports offered are Baseball, Basketball, Cross Country, Football, Golf, Soccer, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Wrestling.

Girls’ sports offered are Basketball, Cheerleading, Cross Country, Golf, Soccer, Softball, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Volleyball.

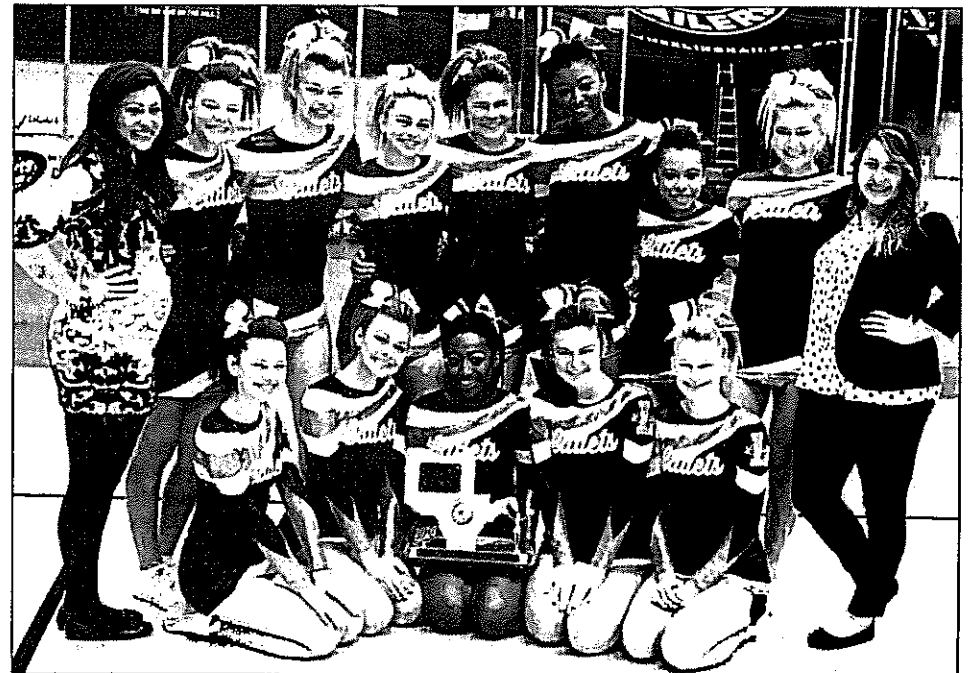
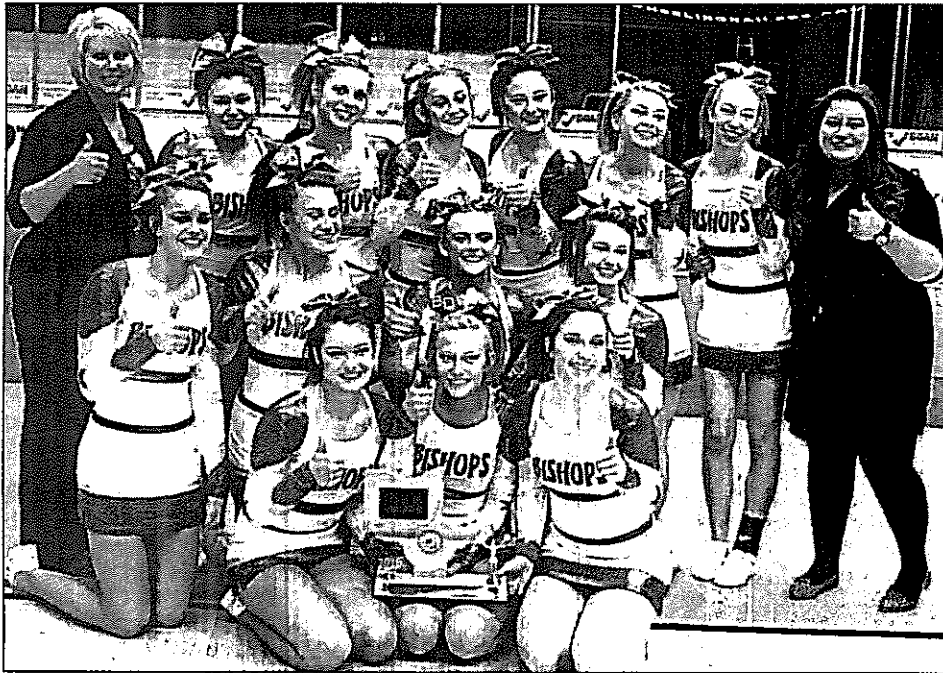
Club sports include Hockey, Boys’ Lacrosse and Girls’ Lacrosse.

**GOOD LUCK
Wheeling Park,
2014 and 2015
West Virginia
State Champions,
in the 2016
OVAC
Cheerleading
Competition**



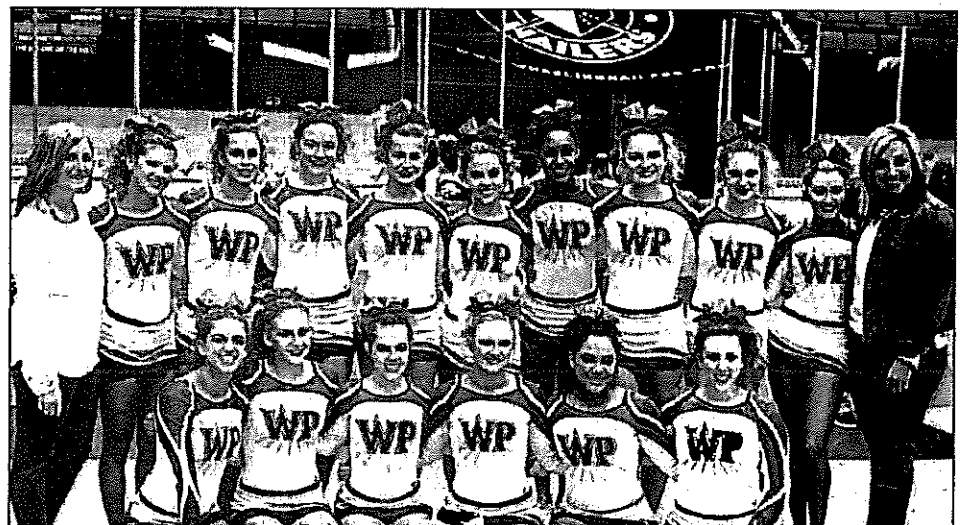
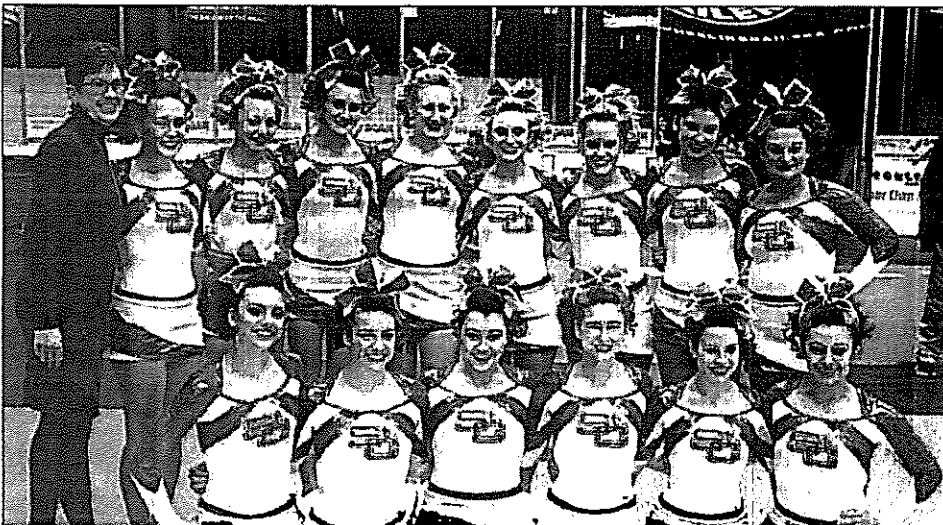


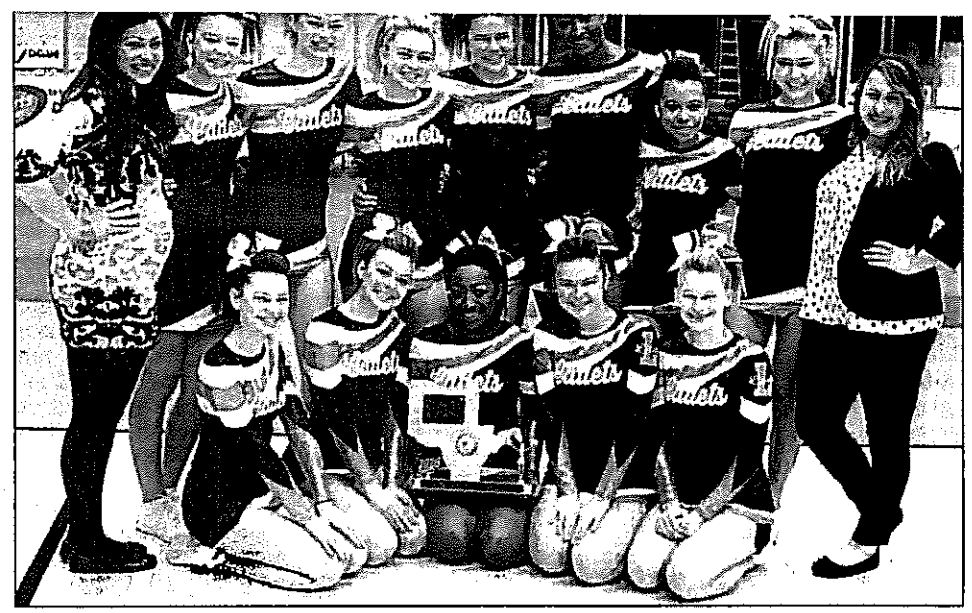
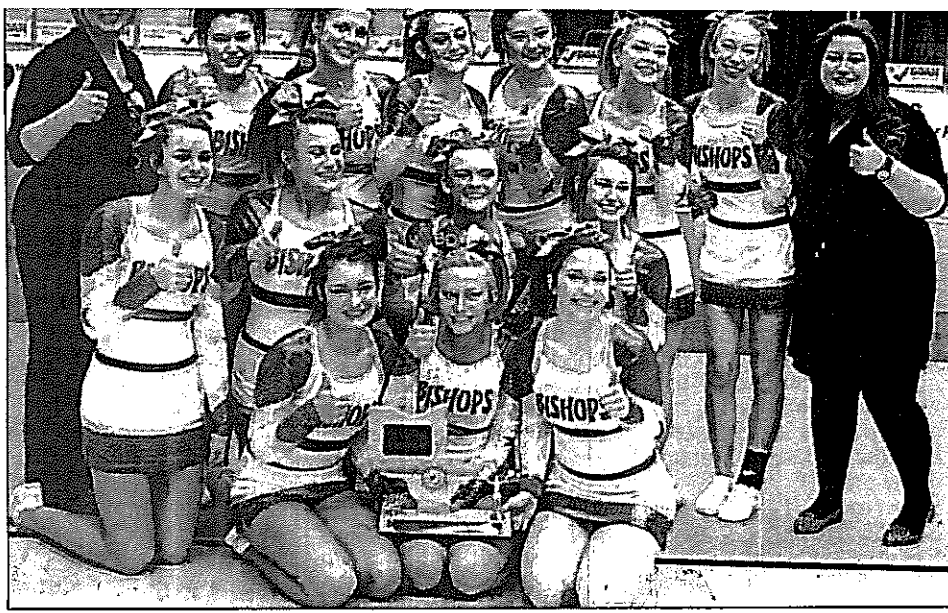
OHIO VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL CHEERING CHAMPIONS



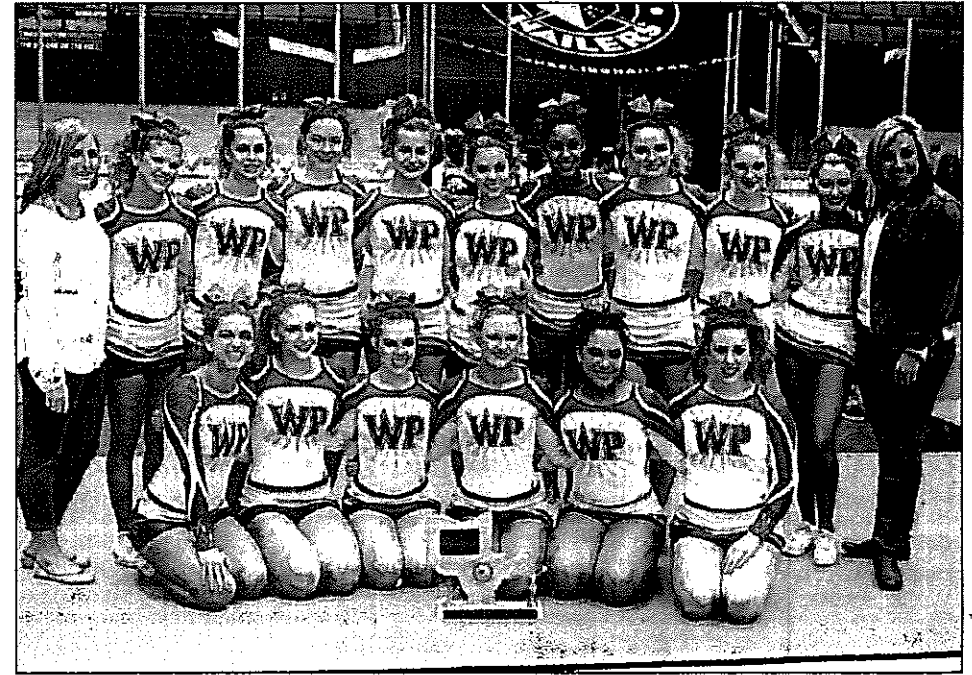
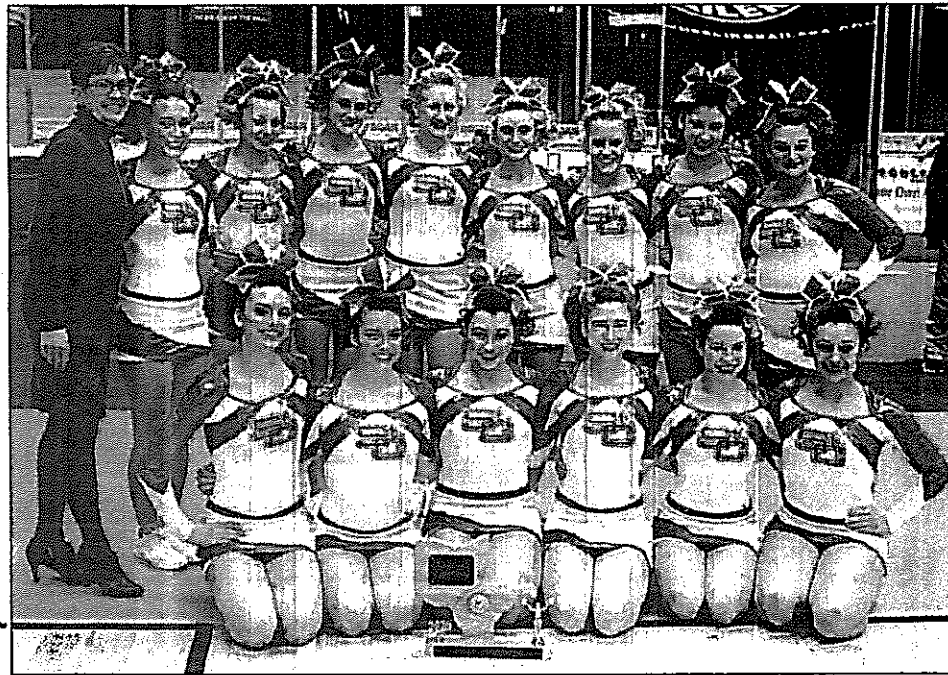
TOP LEFT: Bishop Donahue cheering team poses after winning the class 1A title of the OVACs Saturday. TOP RIGHT: Linsly cheering team poses with their class 3A trophy. BOTTOM LEFT: St. Clairsville cheerleaders and their coaches pose after winning the 4A championship. BOTTOM RIGHT: Wheeling Park cheering squad poses with their coaches after winning the 5A title.

Photos by Bruce Crawford





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TOP LEFT: Bishop Donahue cheering team poses after winning the class 1A title of the OVACs Saturday. TOP RIGHT: Linsly cheering team poses with their class 3A trophy. BOTTOM LEFT: St. Clairsville cheerleaders and their coaches pose after winning the 4A championship. BOTTOM RIGHT: Wheeling Park cheering squad poses with their coaches after winning the 5A title.



Shepherd draws cheers for OVAC work

WHEELING – Is it a sport or not? That is a question central to cheerleading.

Regardless of the answer, the OVAC presents a cheering competition second to none. The 25th annual event plays out Saturday at WesBanco Arena.

The tourney is under the expert and meticulous direction of Libby Shepherd. She has done so for some 20 years.

Shepherd and cheerleading go hand-in-hand. She has been a longtime and passionate crusader in promoting cheering throughout the conference.

Shepherd was a cheerleader during her prep days at Wheeling High. She also has served as cheering coach at Wheeling Park High and Bridge Street Middle School.

"I really enjoy doing it (running the



**Bubba
Kapral**
Executive
Sports Editor

tournament). I have been involved in cheering for most of my life. I can't imagine not doing it," Shepherd said. "The toughest part of the event is the program. Getting all the photos and rosters in is the

hardest part.

"Everything really runs smoothly the day of the championships. (OVAC Executive Secretary) Tom Rataiczak is a huge help. He works with me every step of the way," she added. "I also have some dedicated staffers who really help make everything fall into place."

Rataiczak knows better than anyone the quality work Shepherd brings to the cheering mat.

"For the past 19 years, Libby Shepherd has run the OVAC Cheering Championship with the utmost efficiency and organization. From start to finish, the event runs smoothly and on time," Rataiczak said. "Libby works year-round doing

See, SHEPHERD, Page C2

Shepherd

Continued from Page C1

cheering competitions throughout the Ohio Valley and the state of West Virginia. From PAC-8 to West Virginia Regionals to tryouts, she is always ready to assist with her knowledge and opinion.

"In addition to running the competition, Libby also produces the program which helps fund cheering scholarships. To date, this has awarded over \$27,000 in scholarships. Not only that, but the junior high cheering competition has donated all their profits to help subsidize the Banquet of Champions, which affects every sport and school in the conference," he added. "More than \$50,000 has been turned over since the competition began. Libby is quick to offer ideas and assistance to other sports and directors whenever asked and is always one of the first to volunteer to help."

Unlike a game, cheerleading judging is subjective. It can result in some unhappy campers.

"We always have some people upset. We have five judges selected at a committee meeting. The WVSSAC has a list of certified judges which we utilize. They are very qualified," Shepherd said. "You have winners and losers in sports. People must accept that. My satisfaction comes when everything runs smoothly."

Pulling off an event of such magnitude seamlessly is no easy task.

"You have to witness and watch closely a cheering competition at WesBanco to fully appreciate her efforts. More than 4,000 fans, 25-plus coaches, 300-plus cheerleaders, judges, meals, television, programs and souvenir sales, Libby constantly moves from spot to spot to make certain everything goes off as planned. I'm not certain she's ever been able to watch an entire competition since she started," Rataiczak said. "Unlike other championships, it's one that everyone complains about but no one wants to run. Social networking has added huge concerns that were never thought of before its inception. So there's a lot of parents, girls, schools and fans who have opinions as to the place finishers."

"Unlike a basketball game where you can walk out and point to the winner, few leave WesBanco Arena agreeing on the outcome. That is a huge burden that most directors don't have to be concerned with," he added. "I believe that people won't really understand the job Libby's done until she retires. She's definitely one of the best directors I have ever worked with when it comes to running an event such as this. She takes immense pride in running a first-class championship."

Kapral may be reached at bkapral@timesleaderonline.com

Shepherd Draws Cheers for 20 Years of OVAC Work

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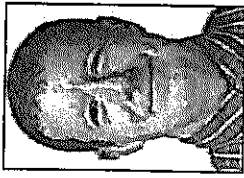
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See, Kapral, Page B3



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KAPRAL**

EXECUTIVE SPORTS
EDITOR

KAPRAL

Continued from page B1

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