

Hula Hooping Hullabaloo

What started out as a talent show performance at Rylander Elementary School in fall 2009 with eight students has grown over the years to a team of 44 students and shows at various venues, including a performance at a Houston Rockets game

Written by Lacey Kupfer Wulf | Photography courtesy of Rylander Elementary

The Rylander Hula Hoop Team started in 2009 with only eight students performing the basics at the Rylander talent show. As numbers have grown over the years, so have the difficulty and complexity of their tricks. This past year they performed at 10 different venues, including talent shows, the Katy Rodeo Parade, several Katy ISD high school halftime shows, a Rice University men's basketball halftime show, and the Houston Rockets halftime show.

Where It All Began

Coach Linda Rowe, physical education teacher and team coach at Rylander, introduced a game called Hula Hoop War, where kids try to knock down someone else's hoop while keeping their hoop spinning the longest. Some kids were invited to try out for the team because of their success in Hula Hoop War, which is one of the students' favorite PE games, while others heard about it from a friend or Rowe in PE. "I had a Hula Hoop Team at the school I was at in the 80's and thought I would start one here at Rylander when I started here in 2008," says Rowe.

For many on the team, these performances and the new people they meet are the highlight of being on the team. Fifth-grader Olivia Krippendorf says, "We get more opportunities. We get to have fun going to the

Rockets game." They already have a few invitations to perform halftime shows next year.

Performing for the Rockets

Years ago the second graders participated in the Houston Rockets BE FIT program. "We had to send in a video of the team performing the routine. The first year we only did the pregame show, but after that they have invited us back for the past two years to do the halftime show." The hoopers have already been invited back for the 2016 to 2017 season. "It is really an honor for the kids to go on the floor at Toyota Center - it is one of our biggest adventures," says Rowe.

Inventing Their Own Tricks

Like any other athlete, these students have to try out for the team and successfully complete seven different hula hoop skills without stopping. Students also have to maintain strong grades and appropriate conduct in class to stay on the team. "Students practice at home, at school, at recess, and any time they can get their hands on a hula hoop," Rowe says. "It takes a lot of hard work, determination, and commitment on their part to master all the skills and then make all the practices and shows."



The Rylander Hula Hoop team has performed during the Houston Rockets halftime show

Not only do they learn tricks and routines Rowe teaches, but the kids are also encouraged to experiment and invent their own tricks. During practice, they can show off their creations and can demonstrate their skills during the freestyle section of the performance, what Rowe calls the “razzle dazzle.” Fifth-grader Elizabeth Campos says, “My favorite part is when we get to do freestyle and express ourselves, and we get to do new tricks.”

Sometimes the tricks students introduce can affect the overall performance routine. “I love when I put a routine together, we try it out, and the kids come up with an idea to make it better,” Rowe says. These invented tricks have special names for the team, such as the “spin cycle” created by Darren Moore.

Teamwork

Through this experimental and cooperative environment, Rowe notes, “I see leadership skills develop and a desire to work together.” In addition to working together to create the overall routine, the Rylander Hula Hoop Team divides into pairs. Addison Stever, third-grader, explains, “We work on doing freestyles together.” Also in third grade, Sahil Bhatia adds, “We always have a partner, and we can talk. We can work with our partner and choose something

to do.” Many of their created tricks come from these partnerships.

Life Lessons

As a result of their hard work, these kids gain self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. “We learn fun tricks to show off to other people,” says fifth-grader Kaylee Martinez. Dylan Peters-Ngyuen adds, “If we don’t know how to do a trick, we just keep practicing.” Rowe says, “I always tell them if they can work this hard to be a member of the Hula Hoop Team, then they can work just as hard to do anything they want to do in life.”

The kids are also learning to forgive themselves. Robert Borden says, “Don’t worry if you mess up. Just have fun because there will be times when you mess up and other times when you do great.” Ryan Murphy adds, “When you drop your hula hoop, carry on. Don’t get super mad at yourself.” For those who participate on the team, a hula hoop means much more than a recess game. **KM**

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