



IT'S HALF-TIME

Katy Drill Teams Sparkle at Rhodes

By Carlee Besier Photography By Suzi Issa

It almost sounds impossible. Over 50 girls dancing in unison, kicking, spinning, and leaping across the football field. And each one of them can do the splits. On both sides. When most people think about drill team, this is the image they get. But the high school drill team has become so much more.

Dancing All Year

Camps and practice in the summer help prepare for football season, which gets the girls warmed up for spring contests. And at the end of the year, they show off all their work in a final spring show. During peak times in football and competition seasons, the girls often practice for 20 hours a week. With this kind of schedule, it's hard to imagine there's time for anything else. "I'm involved in National Charity League, National Honor Society, and other school clubs. So, there's definitely time to have a life outside of dance," says Leah Garner, Senior Lieutenant of the Taylor High School Pacesetters.

Football Season

The drill team is usually the first on the football field, ready to cheer on their team. They enter the field in perfect formations and make two lines for the football team to run through. Half time is their time to shine. The girls take the field in their glittery outfits and huge smiles and mesmerize the crowd with their high kicks and splits. When they're not performing, the girls are in the stands cheering.



Kesley, Melissa, and Jessica are on Katy High School's Bengal Brigade

Danielle, Katie, and Kim dance for the Cinco Ranch Cougar Stars



Everything they do is as a team. They enter the field together, leave the field together, and everything in between is done as one unit. Michelle Blevins, Captain of the Mayde Creek Martinettes, says "The hardest thing is getting the 78 girls on our team to all dance exactly alike." Even though it may be hard to coordinate all those girls, she still says that football season is the best. "It's so exciting to perform at games for our community and friends."

Spring Contests

After football season ends, so do the typical drill team routines. Competition season brings with it new uniforms and more technical dances. Routines usually include pom, lyrical, modern, and jazz. "Our directors do their best to introduce us to as many types of dance as possible," says Claire Vial, Colonel of the Cinco Ranch Cougar Stars.



Elizabeth and Maria dance for the Morton Ranch Maverick Belles



Danielle, Claire, Kim, and Katie of the Cinco Ranch Cougar Stars

“**COMPETITION** IS MY FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR BECAUSE YOU GET TO COMPETE AGAINST OTHER SCHOOLS FROM ALL OVER TEXAS.”
- Kelsey Allen, Colonel, Taylor High School Pacesetters

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Natalie, Kelsey, Shelby, and Leah of the Taylor High School Pacesetters Drill Team



It's because of this competition season that a lot of drill teams are now calling themselves a dance team instead. "We call it a dance team because that's really what it is. I think that the Texas drill teams of the past have evolved into dance teams. We don't just do football season, we have our own season where we perform for ourselves to the best of what we can do together," says Danielle Chester, Lieutenant Colonel of the Cinco Ranch Cougar Stars.

Drill Team Down Time

Summer is the only off-season the girls get during the year, and they still have to attend camp, and if they're an officer, they usually have to attend an officer camp as well. But, just like the football team starts practicing before school starts, so does the dance team.

Some girls, such as Allison Arceneaux, Colonel of the Seven Lakes Sapphires Dance Team, like to take advantage of this down time and take classes at local dance studios to keep up their technique.

Parents Make the Team, Too

When a girl makes the dance team, so do her parents. Karen Fraley has been an active member of the Katy Bengal Brigade & Cheerleaders Booster Club for three years. "Staying involved with my child's activities is important to me. I'm at the school on the average of at least two days a week, and then working on ideas, fundraising, and parent support throughout the week," says Fraley. "July through December is all dance team!"

Chester explains that dance team is not state funded, so each school has to raise all of its own funds to support their camps, trips, competitions, and any other expenses. The cost per girl can range anywhere from \$700 to \$1,500. This is why parents become so involved.

They have monthly booster meetings to plan fundraisers. Her father has become so involved that he and some of the other dads even wanted to wear rhinestoned aprons that said 'Cougar Stars Grill Team' while they were cooking for the girls between competitions in San Antonio. They didn't get made in time, but Chester says they would have worn them.

MAKING THE DANCE TEAM!

You don't have to have 10 years of dance experience to make the team. Several dance studios in Katy offer drill team prep classes. Call these schools to check availability. Start taking prep classes in junior high and you'll be high kicking in no time!

Adamson Ballet School

641 S. Mason Rd. • 281-579-7874
adamsonballet.com

Allegro West Academy of Dance

1718 N. Fry Rd. • 281-599-7009
allegrowestonline.com
281-787-5025

Becky's Academy of Dance

2501 S. Mason Rd.
281-398-9226
beckysonline.com

Juleigh Holley's School of Dance

27025 Hwy. 90 • 281-391-8900
danceinkaty.com

Stephanie's Dance Studio One

20829 Kingsland Blvd.
281-578-3840
stephaniesdancestudioone.com

Kristi, Taylor, and Michelle of the Mayde Creek Martinettes



Tryouts

In order to try out for the dance team, most schools require parents to attend an informational meeting about cost and time commitment. Forms must be filled out, and then the girls must attend a weeklong tryout clinic. Although the details of the tryout process may vary from school to school, judging is mostly based on the candidates ability to do right and left splits, kick technique, kick height, kick memory, jazz/lyrical technique and memory, poise/posture/showmanship, and across the floor technique.

Katy ISD also has a few ground rules that must be followed. Judging is always done by three impartial judges from outside Katy ISD. These judges rank the skills and showmanship of the candidates, and a predetermined number of girls are accepted based on those rankings.

Arceneaux says the best way to make the team is to take as many dance classes from as many different teachers as possible. However, you don't need tons of experience to make the team. Chester says, "You just have to work hard and stay positive. I knew two girls that started dancing their freshman year in high school and made lieutenant by their senior year."

More Than Just Dance

Fraley says that being a member of the dance team has changed her daughter. "Mrs. Hyatt-Henson is constantly reminding the girls that they are ladies, in the way they dance, talk, and represent Katy High School." She says Kesley, her daughter, has also become more responsible, and her confidence has grown since becoming an officer.

So the next time you're at Rhodes Stadium, don't leave to grab a snack during half-time. Stick around and watch these girls. They work hard all year to put on a great show, and you wouldn't want to miss it, would you? **KM**

CARLEE BESIER is a recent graduate of Baylor University and the assistant editor of Katy Magazine.

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