

United States Cheer Officials Survey Results Executive Summary

Introduction

Every aspect of cheer officiating has changed considerably since the inception of cheer competitions. For example, when cheer competitions began in the late 1980's, judges for competitions were selected from cheerleading camp staff, many of whom are still a part of the judging circuit today. The demands and expectations of a cheer judge have drastically increased, because judges are now subject to extensive training of the scoring rubric, deductions and safety rules. Despite an increase in revenue generated as a result of increased participation in the sport, cheer judges' salaries have not increased. In addition to lower salaries, judges are also required to work longer hours with little or no rest periods. In essence, the sport of cheerleading has become a multi-million dollar professional business but the "camp staff" mentality of how judges are treated has remained the same.

Survey Purpose

The purpose of the survey is to provide a mechanism of communication as well as provide positive constructive feedback to the industry. The survey also provides for the following:

- Allows judges to convey their opinions without fear of reprisal from the leaders in the cheer industry.
- Provides for concrete suggestions for change that are backed by data.
- Prevents a mass exodus of trained highly skilled judges from the sport of cheerleading.

Methodology

The questions included in the survey were developed based on various issues raised by judges. These issues include the following subjects:

- Demographic data
- Pay
- Payment practices
- Hours worked
- Training and knowledge of rubric
- Varsity All Star Association

Conclusion

Because of the high learning curve of obtaining the skills necessary to judge, especially at the higher levels (levels 4 and/or 5), it is imperative that competition companies address the issues outlined in this report. Losing a large part of the judges who are considered to be high performing at the elite level will have detrimental effects on scoring results for the next several years.

Data Results

Fig.1 displays the number and percentage of survey participants answering the question regarding the number of hours they have been required to judge. Based on this chart, 68% of survey participants stated they are required to work 8 to 12 hours per day while judging.

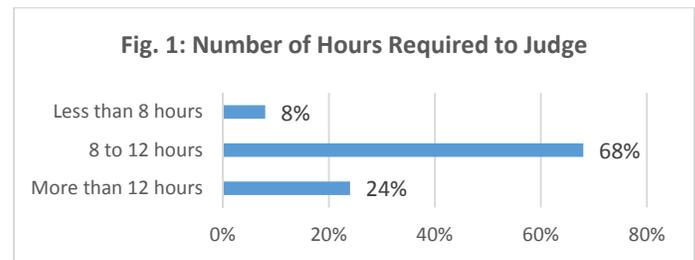


Fig. 2 displays the percentage of people answering the question regarding the average lunch break they received while judging competition. Based on the data shown, 52% of those answering the question stated they received 20 to 40 minutes for their lunch break.

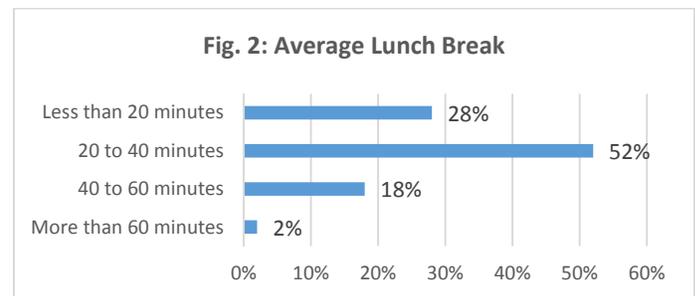
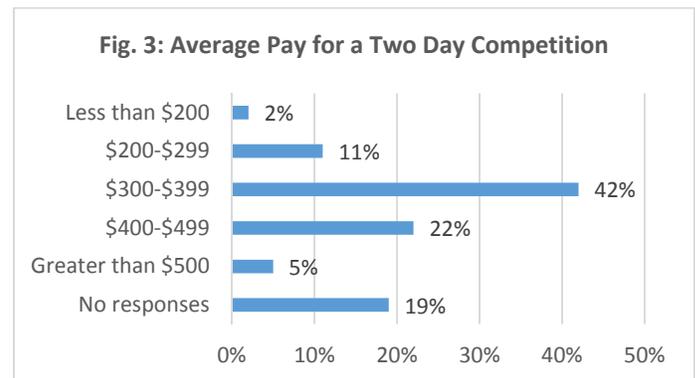


Fig. 3 displays the percentage of people answering the question regarding the average pay for a two day competition. Base on the data shown, 42% of those answering the question stated they receive \$300-\$399 for a two day competition.

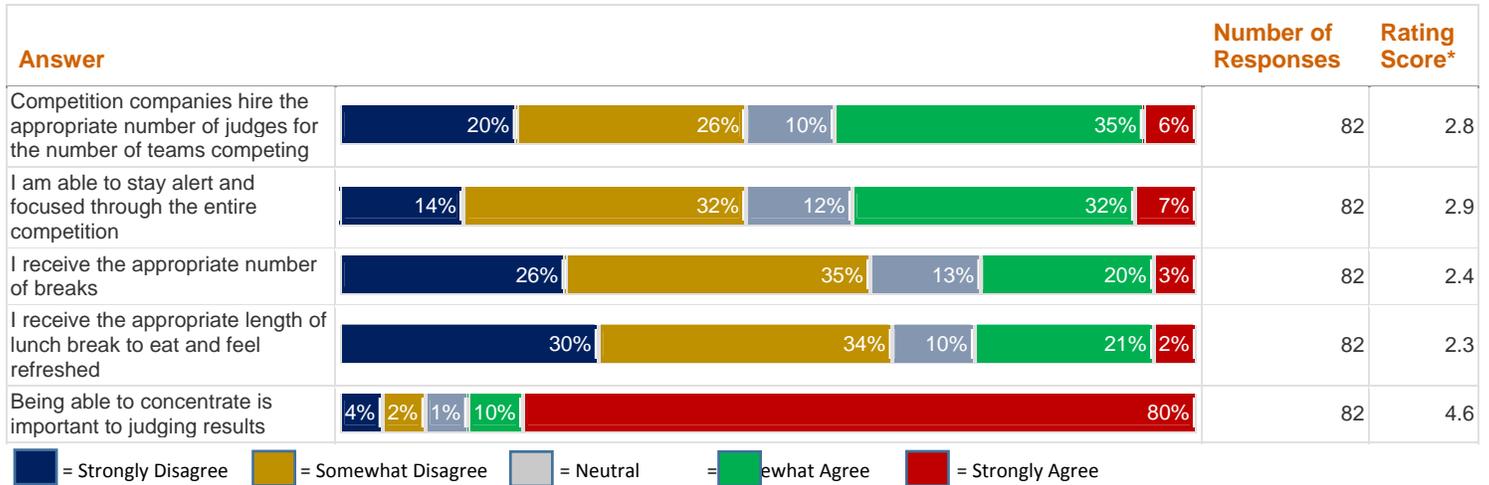


Historically, it has been believed that faulty and inconsistent judging results stemmed from poor knowledge of the rubric by judges. This survey concludes that inconsistencies that exist in scoring results are not a function of lack of education but a function of the following factors:

- Judge fatigue and burnout
- Decreased pay
- Inconsistent interpretation of the rubric by Event Producers
- Nonexistent judges skill assessment
- Judge retirement
- Level of judging experience

Judges were asked a series of questions as it relates to the numbers and types of people hired to judge. When presented with the statement Competition companies hire the appropriate number of judges for their competitions, of the 82 judges responding, 46% answered negatively, 41% answered positively and 10% answered neutral. Of the 82 people that answered this question, the data is split amongst those answering positively and negatively (refer to Fig. 4)

Fig. 4: Range Questions Based on the Judging Panels during the 2012-2013 Competition Season



Judges love the sport of cheerleading and the job they perform as an adjudicator. The vast majority of judges approach their job in a very professional manner, take great steps to ensure their adjudicating is fair and accurate, and take their position in the sport very seriously. However, in recent years, the concerns of judges, the impact of working conditions, autonomy, as well as a lack of professionalism of Brand owners, have diminished the love and desire for judging. Many are working professionals in their full time professions and understand how professionalism and respect influence their work-life balance. They would rather retire from the sport they love, then continue to work under these uncomfortable conditions.

Based on the results provided above, the analyst of the survey recommends the following:

- **Standardize the judge selection process across brands** – Judges should be selected by a centralized process based on experience and level of expertise and each level. This removes arbitrary selection based on relationships and loyalty to each brand. For instance, implement a test for each level to ensure that adjudicators have the knowledge required to judge certain levels under the category of their expertise.
- **Develop a judging organization that is separate and distinct from competition brands-** The judging organization should control the selection and placement of judges for each competition. This will ensure the selection of judges will be based on merit as opposed to relationships with event producers and owners. It will also ensure that the best judges are selected especially for high stakes events.
- **Provide for a Head Official at each event** – Head Officials should have complete control over the outcome of the event. Removing control of event outcome from Event Producers alleviates the burden of making a decision that affects their financial bottom line, and thus gym owners cannot threaten not to return to events in order to influence the results.
- **Implement a judging hour maximum** – Judges should judge only 8 hours or less in order to prevent fatigue, which in turn impairs decision making and concentration. Judges should never be required to eat meals at the judges table or sacrifice restroom breaks due to scheduling issues.
- **Provide a pay amount consistent with industry standard** - Gymnastics, Ice Skating and Tennis level of pay should be considered when determining a more appropriate amount. Pay should be reflective of the amount of hours worked as well as level of experience and the level being judged