

MAKING 'EM CHEER

WE LEAD! WE SUCCEED!

...as told by a Harvard Cheerleader



MICHAEL BACHMANN



PORTLAND • OREGON
INKWATERPRESS.COM

Copyright © 2012 by Michael Bachmann

Cover and interior design by Masha Shubin

Cheerleading equipment © Pudding. BigStockPhoto.com
Choose My Plate graphic and information provided by USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher and/or author. Contact Inkwater Press at 6750 SW Franklin Street, Suite A, Portland, OR 97223-2542. 503.968.6777

Publisher: Inkwater Press | www.inkwaterpress.com

Paperback
ISBN-13 978-1-59299-720-6 | ISBN-10 1-59299-720-1

Kindle
ISBN-13 978-1-59299-721-3 | ISBN-10 1-59299-721-X

Printed in the U.S.A.
All paper is acid free and meets all ANSI standards for archival quality paper.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Contents

Introduction: Cheerleading—We Lead, We Succeed	1
Chapter 1: It’s All About Cheering!	17
Chapter 2: The Eleven Cheeriac Kudos.....	31
Chapter 3: The Ancestral Cheerleading Tree.....	46
Chapter 4: The Cheerleading Buzz—Stepping Stone to Success	63
Chapter 5: Cheerleader Today & President Tomorrow...It Can Happen!.....	81
Chapter 6: Cheerleading: The Ultimate Pep Rally for Life.....	95
Chapter 7: Making the Team.....	115
Chapter 8: Team Leadership.....	130
Chapter 9: Cheerleading: Makin’ It Happen	146
Chapter 10: Taking Control of Projects—The Boxman Pizza Approach	159
Chapter 11: Quitting: Stay Away From the Trojan Horse!	177
Chapter 12: Show Your Best Stuff: Moving on in School	185
Chapter 13: To Cheer Safely	200
Chapter 14: The Best Physical You! Map to Move and Food...	212
Chapter 15: Believe in Cheeracles!.....	222
Conclusion: Making ‘Em Cheer! The Cheerleading Us	225

...Life's great! We're cheerleaders!

A Special Thanks To:

Professor Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, my mentor, who gave me the theme of this book—leadership. Professor Danspeckgruber, who is the Founding Director of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self Determination, showed me the meaning of leadership that benefits the world. He is the best mentor anyone could have. I am extremely fortunate that I can look to him for advice and instruction.

Deborah Lynch, my artistic muse, who says that each of us has a story to tell. How true! She was my encouragement to rev up my typing fingers and write a book.

Mrs. Mary Melling, Mrs. Victoria Ehrhardt, and Mrs. Rebecca Sanders, the best teachers in the world. They are my high school teachers who gave me the foundation to thrive in college...and the tools to take on this project.

Aunt Katherine, who gave me my cheer voice and Ms. Marlene Tedeschi, who made me find my storytelling voice...even though I didn't know it was lost!

Uncle Tom, for hanging with me (and without me) for countless hours, to make this book happen. Super collaborator, assistant writer, researcher, and editor...and my best cheerfan!

INTRODUCTION

Cheerleading—We Lead, We Succeed

Hey! Let's get started. And let's do it in a way that revs up my passion and I'm sure yours...about cheerleading!

Here goes!

Action! Action! Turn up the Juice!
Set Your Feelings & Passions Loose!
Move it! Bend it! Shake it! Snap it!
Fight! Explode! Win! Let's Rap it!"
Inspirin' our team to victory is why we're here!
We measure our success by Making 'Em Cheer!

All right, all right! Can never get enough cheering in! But let's shoot ahead and talk about what being a cheerleader is all about... why I'm running on overdrive when it comes to cheerleading...and, why I'm staying geared up!

For starters, cheerleading is definitely THE sport. What's more exciting than whipping up the fans during an action-packed football game? Or getting hit dead on with that "gonna slam it bounce" that cranks up performances in regional and national competitions? It's amazing! And, if you're a cheerleader like me, you've

already been zapped with the supercharged energy our sport shoots out like an erupting volcano. In fact, you may think you know all the good stuff about our sport! That YOU don't need another cheerleader clueing you in on even more!

“NO way! Hear me out!”

Sure! You've felt what a blast it is to cheer at games. You've showcased your skills in competitions! You've whipped up the crowds at assemblies! You're living the dream!

But the good times are only beginning! I'm going to talk about over-the-top makeovers you can get from our sport! Stuff you don't know...yet! I'll share tips on how to rock on high school and college teams. How to push ahead that extra mile in school! How to dash across the finish line first! How to light up a room!

And, for anyone who hasn't yet taken the plunge, give it a try! Hear me out on the high-voltage feelings thundering your way with our sport. Stop doubting yourself. Stop second-guessing your gut instincts. Just go for it! Check us out and come into OUR zone! Believe me. Once here, you won't wanna leave!

“So what's my bottom line?”

This! Cheerleading's definitely a slam dunk when it comes to scoring big! As a cheerleader, anything's possible. We own supercharged power, energy and pizzazz! Hey, maybe you'll be the next headliner on the Disney Channel or the next hot reality show! Don't think you've got what it takes? No way! Lots of cheerleaders have made it big as entertainers.

Being on the team also infuses us with instant star power in school. Aren't we the admired leaders walking the halls? Think about it. We're the ones who motivate classmates, fans and players. During games, we emit positive energy at even the worst moments! I've yelled out cheers even when my team was being destroyed!

Non-cheerleaders ask us, “Why?”

Simple answer!

“Because it's what we do!”

Definitely illustrates the unique leadership abilities we soak in

from cheerleading. Without a doubt we stand out in a crowd and are the people others want to be like! And who others recognize and respect!

Add to this mix our sports greatness! We're over the top when it comes to being physically fit and true sports professionals! Cheerleaders master demanding athletic stunts and perform them before super-packed stadiums of fans. We know these stunts aren't easy and anyone who's tried them knows it too!

Throw into this mix the fact that with enthusiastic charisma, we pump up the crowds at pep rallies to make sure fans are ready to tumble on game day! Then, top it all off with the fact we always look stunning and know how to "put-it-together." And, honestly, when you add all of this, I can't think of any other sport that tops ours in promoting leadership and that "can-do" spirit. So shed the shoes and kick back. Tear into a bag of nachos, twist open a jar of salsa and chill with me for a few hours. I'll fill you in on all the great but not so obvious stuff about cheerleading...in detail.

The material I've jammed into this book will shake up your creativity and flood your mind with facts and ideas. Facts and ideas on how our sport leads to good things happening to your school grades, your social life, your family interactions, your high school and college experience, and to YOU. I'll also explain why cheerleaders are destined to ride the wave of achievement in every project we take on. Hey, instead of bouncing around like a beach ball, we stay committed to our goals and go straight for the gold! I'm convinced cheerleaders are superstars! That's who and what we are! "Cheerleader" equates with being "best" in the sports world... and beyond!

Along with explaining my ideas about the sport, I'll tell you about the cheerleader "me." For starters, I cheer on the Harvard University squad. Cheerleading is one of the many traditions at Harvard, like at most schools, that students and alumni love. Hey, one of our United States Presidents was a Harvard cheerleader!

I'll also review our cheerleading history and talk about amazing

current and former cheerleading relatives on our family tree. Most people have no clue that many of the famous and influential actors, singers, models, and leaders they read about or see on TV or the internet once were cheerleaders. Yup, cheerleaders like us. For example, celebrities the paparazzi chase after, such as Miley Cyrus, Jennifer Lawrence, Snooki, Madonna, Kendall Jenner, Jessica Simpson, Hailee Steinfeld, Jamie Lynn Spears and Fergie were out there cheering their teams on before they captured the lime-light! Or, as I like to put it, their cheerleading prepped them for stardom. For other stars, there's a different scoop! Dakota Fanning hit celebrity status before morphing to cheerleader and Selena Gomez had "cheerleader" on her wish list! BTW, did you catch Katy Perry performing a full split while in a cheerleading uniform at a Teen Choice Awards program? Wow!

Turning to cheerleaders in politics, several United States Presidents were previously one of us. Now, although President Obama didn't spend time in the cheering zone, six other Presidents did. I know that number doesn't sound particularly huge, but hey, our sport's only been recognized for about 100 years. This makes it impossible for George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and other early presidents to have hauled a megaphone into the White House. But our sport's reach into government doesn't stop with the Oval Office. In addition to the Presidents, our cheerleading government leaders include state senators, a governor, a congresswoman and a Supreme Court Justice. Pretty impressive!

Today, there are thousands of cheerleaders who're out there shining in the local spotlight, both at their schools and in their communities. If you're like me, I'm sure you want to stay on this list of up and coming cheerleaders spiraling to the top! Keep it going and it's only a matter of time before the paparazzi camp outside your home waiting to snap your photo for the entertainment mags, blogs and TV shows! Hey, I don't have a problem hiding behind shades.

In two words... "Let's go!"

Let's get out there with megaphones and let it rip about our sport and about ourselves! Let's spread the cheer message! Cheerleading condenses the world into one huge pep rally! Cheerleading makes it a friendlier place to roam. And with our optimistic outlook and leadership abilities, it's only natural that we should assume the role of world ambassadors! I'm confident my cheerleading pizzazz will vault me up to reach the goals I'm aiming for! And this brings me to where I'm at in the cheerleading world.

Like you, I'm one of the over 7 billion humans living on our planet! More important, I'm one of the growing number of national and international cheerleaders! Since I'm a student at Harvard, my home is a dorm near the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts. That makes me one of almost 52,000,000 New Englanders. There're about 450 undergraduates checked into this dorm with me. And most, like me, come from other states and countries.

Now, even though I'm into numbers, I promise to stop talking about them soon. But I'm finally getting to the one that rocks my life. And that number is 20! Why 20? No, it's not the number secretly encoded within the Mayan calendar. It's the number of friends I constantly connect with.

And these "friends" aren't clandestine members of some secret campus society or anything like that. My closest school buddies, as you probably guessed, are the 20 cheerleaders on my team. We practice and cheer together, and of course give it our all at competitions! We're "the ones" who maximally turn it on for volunteer activities, raise money for competitions and party together. In short, we're a tight-knit and supportive cheerfam. We're pretty inseparable. Of the 21 on the squad, there are 17 gals and 4 guys. As you've already figured out, I'm one of the guys.

My full name, which is rather long, is Michael Henry Ethan Bachmann. I guess I was given such a big name because I was pretty small when I "cheered" my way into the delivery room. Three pounds to be exact! Seems like my arrival came a few weeks before I was supposed to! I don't remember deciding to be born

early, but I suppose I couldn't wait to start stunting! So I skipped a few months and landed in the hospital on October 22nd instead of December 7th.

Despite my size, I've been told by my family that I had a monster cry. Back then, they denied thinking about my potential as a cheerleader, but did entertain a future for me as the lead singer in a heavy metal band. Obviously, the volume of my bawling must have been ear deafening. I'm planning to let loose on the vocal cords someday. For now, though, I'm kept jumping with school, completing projects for my internship position and perfecting cheer-leading stunts and skills.

I was a "Jersey guy" until I sprang from high school and moved off to college. My address these days is the Eliot House on the Harvard campus. This dorm, named after a former Harvard President, Charles Eliot, isn't really a house, but more like a small village plunked down on campus. It's really cool living here! We have a dorm library and get this, a movie room! And, talk about convenience. Once dinner ends, our dining hall transforms into a study hall. Of course, this instantly available study area eliminates the excuse for not finishing homework because a "closed" sign hangs on the library door! Our dining hall looks out on an open courtyard where the music blasts away at house parties and barbecues. So far, the space hasn't rocked to any pep rallies. That's because our rallies happen in Harvard Yard, the heart of the campus!

Our dorm is represented by a pretty unusual animal... an elephant! Now you may wonder, "Why an elephant?"—especially since we're not on their home continent of Africa or Asia. Well, one little known fact about elephants is that they were early Americans! Had we been around about 13,000 years ago, their ancient relatives, the mastodon, would have been invading our backyards just like squirrels do today. Can you imagine chasing a mastodon off the deck? Anyhow, although I'm convinced the elephant's extraordinary muscular power and extremely clever personality, as well as its playful and curious ways...traits definitely shared by

cheerleaders, were the reasons for this choice, that's not so! This very social animal is associated with the Eliot family crest.

Speaking of mascots, Harvard's is pretty unusual! It's actually the college's namesake, John Harvard. Too bad we don't have a cool one like Handsome Dan, who is Yale's bulldog, or Princeton's raging tiger! Hey, did you know that Princeton's mascot actually started out as a lion? It was in the early 1880s, after the sophomore baseball team decorated lion statues with orange ribbons with black lettering, that the tiger was born. Seeing cats draped in orange and black all over campus led to the Princeton teams being referred to as the tigers! Oops! It was time to change the lion mascot.

During junior year, I shared living space with one other student on Eliot's 3rd floor. We were creative in transforming our two rooms and a bathroom into sleeping, living, and study areas. Yet, ever-growing piles of books, sports stuff, guitar, amplifier and clothes clearly spelled "filled to capacity" in my area. Friends were blown away by my uncanny ability to locate cheerleading gear in the piles of belongings stacked in every inch of space. Could be I'm part "storage" wizard. In any event, as a senior there's five of us sharing six rooms. Lots more space to spread out indispensable possessions and cheerleading stuff!

Its steps, steps and more steps at Eliot House! As a result of absentee elevators, the mandatory "step exerciser" to my room is extremely annoying after intense practices. I used to get even more leg-pumping exercise during sophomore year. Back then I lived in the thin-aired space way up on the fifth floor, one floor below the music room. Had you visited me there, you'd have sworn there were speakers in the ceiling pumping music into my room. Hey, a cool fact. Our music room was named after Leonard Bernstein, a famous Harvard grad, who wrote the music to *West Side Story*. Unfortunately, although I checked it out, he never wrote any marching band music. So, unless the "Jet Song" or "Something's Coming" makes it onto the playing field, I won't be stunting to his music. However, another powerhouse on the Hollywood scene

who was both a cheerleader and an Eliot resident is comedian Jack Lemmon. Although he was from the older generation of actors, his cheerleader enthusiasm is packed into many of the classic films he starred in. In the mood for some LOLs? Check out *The Odd Couple* and *Grumpy Old Men*.

Like many basements, Eliot's is overflowing with an assortment of rooms filled with lots of new, old and left-over items added to continuously by each year's student class. Classrooms, a laundry room, TV rooms, a photo shop, dance studio, and, get this, a woodshop are tucked away in this spacious underground labyrinth. With a fully stocked woodshop at my fingertips, I'm racking my brain thinking of a cheering prop to construct there. So far I'm coming up empty with any creative flash, but I haven't given up! We also have an exercise room that's not just for cheerleaders, but for all dorm students. To catch up with Eliot boat club members, I go work out there. It's one of their favorite hangouts.

Our basement walls are covered with lots of student graffiti. It's allowed! So, whenever Eliot students get either totally bored or really creative, we wander down to the basement and doodle away! It's not all cartoon characters or messing around stuff, though—one of my favorites is a drawing of Gandhi.

Branching out from the basement, and behind locked doors, is an extensive tunnel system that's used to cart food from the Eliot House kitchen to the other campus dorms. Steam to heat the buildings is also transported down there, most likely transforming them into underground spas in the winter! These tunnels, which extend under Harvard Yard and other campus areas, are off limits to students. No big deal, though! My idea of fun doesn't include hanging out in steamy subterranean tunnels. If allowed some time there, though, can you imagine what over the top acoustics there'd be for shouting out cheers!

Enough about the building! So what's a way-out fact about my dorm that few people know? Nope—not co-ed bathrooms.

Nope—no indoor swimming pool! Nope—no rock climbing walls! Instead...

We have a ghost! No kidding! Our dorm ghost is said to be that of Charles Eliot himself. Apparently ghost Eliot didn't want to leave Harvard and so he wanders the halls and basement at night, checking in on us. According to urban legend, some students have had sightings of him! I myself have been spared the "treat" of meeting up with him. Especially on those dark, winter evenings when I'm stuck in the basement laundry room performing "wash, dry, fold" work. Unfortunately, I've heard no reports of our ghost inspiring school spirit by yelling out Harvard cheers while doing toe touches in our exercise room!

Seriously, though, our ghost is said to be quite harmless and very student friendly. Would you believe he's supposed to help students with tough homework assignments? So where is he when I need him? Right before a statistics problem set is due!

My cheerleading home at Harvard is the Gordon Indoor Track, a building close to Soldier's Field, our football stadium, and Lavietes Pavilion, our basketball court. Running between my dorm and cheerleading home is the sweet Charles River, which I cross by a well-traveled bridge. I've been told that when there's a mist over the river, our ghost leaves Eliot to get in some rowing. Well, I haven't seen him on the water yet. But hey, if there's a ghost rowing out there, I sure wish he'd row my way and take me to practice.

In addition to the cheerleading team, several other sports teams and clubs practice at the Track at the same time we do. On any given day, I can run into baseball, softball, track and field, tennis, and ultimate Frisbee team members. I like the suspense of never knowing who'll be practicing with us, so I rarely check the posted schedule. Since the cheerleaders work out on a more spacious middle part of the floor, we usually have to dodge other athletes practicing around us. Hey, no worry! We're quick on our feet and haven't had any collisions...yet!

Sharing space with other teams is ok. But, there is one huge

downside. Our mats never stay put! They're constantly in motion, like me! But, dragging mats in from the storage bin located outside the building and dragging them back out again after practice is an annoying fact of life for us. Is this your mat situation, too? Oh, and you can add to my list of annoyances the unavoidable cold showers we get soaked with on rainy days thanks to those mats! Too bad Ghost Eliot only tutors and rows!

Interestingly, at our full practices, the cheerfam doesn't rehearse cheers. Our cheers are passed down from senior members to the junior ones, somewhat like family heirlooms. The new gals first review a DVD with all the basics. Next, they're mentored on the cheers and their accompanying motions by the veterans. For us guys, its megaphones and only megaphones! Since we don't perform any motions, the gals teach us the vocals. During games, when the cheering starts, it's up with the megaphones and we blast away. It's cheer time!!!

As a cheerleader, do you find yourself leaving games or competitions with your brain still humming cheers or the music you're stunting to? I do! A few spirit cheers constantly get stuck in my head. Hours afterwards, I'm repeating them over and over again. Here are a few I shout in my sleep! Since I can't jump out from the page to show you, you'll have to take my word for it that I turn it up! My favorites may be similar to yours, as well. Except your school's name would be inserted into the appropriate spots!

Here we go, Harvard, here we go!

and

H-, A-, R-, V-, A-, R- D-
Let's! Go! Harvard!

and

Crimson and White! Crimson and White!
Goooo, Harvard! Yell, Crimson! Crimson!

Goooo, Harvard! Yell, White! White!
Goooo, Harvard! Yell, Crimson and White!
Crimson and White! Crimson and White!

Hey, if you're in Cambridge, come and see us in action! We cheer at every home football game and at men's and women's home basketball games. The schedule is posted on the Harvard sports website.

Before you visit, though, be sure to learn the famous Harvard fight song, "Ten Thousand Men of Harvard." At every football game, the marching band rises and blasts out this song each time Harvard scores and after each Harvard victory. It's awesome to belt it out at the top of your lungs while in the stadium with fans wildly cheering. Check out the song on this site: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjlyFpRuIqk>. In this clip, the cheerleaders can be seen towards the ending!

Talk about way out there, the first verse is meant to be sung in Latin (crazily, although they're genuine Latin words, they have no meaning as strung together in the song)! But have no fear. It's the popular fourth verse which, fortunately, is in English, that's usually sung.

What's amazing about this song is its age and staying power! It dates back to 1918, a time when cheerleading was gaining in popularity. It's also long before Harvard became coed. The "old Eli" in the song refers to the Yale students. Yale was also "guys only" at that time. They didn't admit women until 1969. Here goes:

Ten thousand men of Harvard want vict'ry today,
For they know that o'er old Eli,
Fair Harvard holds sway.
So then we'll conquer old Eli's men,
And when the game ends, we'll sing again:
Ten thousand men of Harvard gained vict'ry today!

To really wow your friends, try singing the first verse! In Latin!

Illegitimum non carborundum;
Domine salvum fac.
Illegitimum non Carborundum;
Domine salvum fac.
Gaudeamus igitur!
Veritas non sequitur?
Illegitimum non carborundum—ipso facto!

By the way, I was blown away the first time I heard this verse resonating in Soldier's Field after a Harvard victory. I got inspired! My mouth spontaneously belted it out, too! In Latin! And, I've never studied Latin! As the Latin words bounced off stadium seats, I imagined traveling back 2,000 years to ancient Rome. There I was at the Forum, decked out in a cheering toga with megaphone in hand, spurring the fans on at a gladiator exhibition! "Hail, Caesar! Go Empire! Fight! Fight! Fight!"

Let's wrap up! I'm moving on to more good stuff about our amazing sport. What better way to put it all together than sharing some awesome words one of my sports heroes, Howard White, inspires with. Let me tell you a little about him. Mr. White, although not a professional athlete himself, helped start the Air Jordan sneaker line. Nice! I met Mr. White at a community event that took place at the hospital I've been volunteering at since high school.

At the time of his visit I was on my high school's tennis team. My coach arranged for our team to attend this event. Mr. White, who was speaking to several student groups, wowed us with his message. Simply stated, say no to checking out of your goals. No matter what! Even if life's a downer and no other options are finding you! And talk about a rotten turn of events! A knee injury forced Mr. White to chuck his goal of becoming an NBA basketball player. Most people throw up their hands and toss away their dream when a disaster like that strikes. But, not Mr. White! He changed course slightly and took charge of another basketball great's sneaker line. He emphasized that all of us have to believe we're capable of achieving our personal dream in spite of any adversity blocking

our stride. Altering goals is ok. On the other hand, it's not ok to abandon them. Mr. White reached his goal by never wavering from it. When the door to his NBA dream slammed shut in his face, he opened up another one.

Fantastic message! Or, as my translation goes: "Always cheeriac forward!" Now, I know you're raising your eyebrows? Like, "What the heck is Mike talking about? What's 'cheeriac' all about?" Well, here goes! To me, cheerleaders have a cheeriac attitude, which translates into our always forging ahead with "I'll give it my best shot!" Because of our cheer-mania, obstacles can't dampen our mojo. In every situation, we're the scene and we know we can produce! Think about it.

We never stop leading!
We never stop pushing ahead!
We never give up!

Hey! It describes us! We rally others without too much sweat, right? And, we can rally ourselves!

So, what am I a cheeriac about? Up front... graduating from college! I'm also cranking it up to be one of the best guy flyers nationally. In addition, I'm going to push for each of us to develop the leadership skills that circulate in cheerleaders like blood through arteries. Lastly, I'd like us to join together and bump up cheerleading to one of the top sports in the world! Look at it this way. As cheerleaders we accomplish lots of good stuff on our own. Just think of what we can accomplish together as avid cheeriacs for our sport. And who else can power us to #1? Aren't we the cheer "leaders"?

Okay. Okay. A next logical question, "How and when did Mike get supercharged on cheerleading? Was he born with a megaphone in his hand? Was he stunting before walking?"

"Hey, it's time to come clean! Just the facts on how cheerleading entered into my life...and how it's stuck!"

MAKING 'EM CHEER

CHAPTER 1

It's All About Cheering!

As you can probably tell, I love **BEING A CHEERLEADER!** But I wasn't always one. Truth is, before blasting onto the cheerleading scene I first took up gymnastics in elementary school. Then, after a few years, I switched to competitive trampoline. High school was especially hectic. I was training on the trampoline four days a week year round and as I just mentioned, slamming killer serves for my school's tennis team. Although I'd known about cheerleading from running into cheerleaders at games and the gym where I trained, I didn't seriously zero in on it immediately.

“What was I waiting for?”

...beats me???

But I kept on waiting...right up to junior year in high school. That's when I started checking out the sport with the cheerleaders I bumped into and on the internet. And was I blown away by what I picked up!

As I vacuumed in details about cheerleading, the list of sports I planned to explore in college grew by one. My initial list listed three: trampoline, gymnastics, and a sport off most radar screens—diving. The reason? Diving skills are almost trampoline moves, done in reverse. Diving's head first...trampoline's feet first! Once

cheerleading hit and engulfed my radar, my final list ripped open to four! Cheerleading's allure woke me up! It was check-it-out time.

Exploring the cheerleading world was my lucky break. I zoomed into the sport's breadth and depth and became totally enamored. Within a short period of time, I deleted gymnastics and diving from my list. But I still had to tackle the big question. If I latched onto cheerleading, how was trampoline gonna continue to fit into my life? Or would it?

By senior year, my competition scores made me a nationally ranked trampolinist while I was just a budding cheerleader! Decision time hit hard! Talk about flipping around! Should I continue trampoline? Or should I take the plunge, drop it and go full force into cheerleading? Like most seniors trying to figure out what to do after high school, this was a crazy time for me. I was b and b'ed—befuddled and beleaguered! I wanted to make a rational decision and not an emotional one. But I knew I had to decide, and decide fast.

Finally, my brain shifted into drive. I'd approach this problem objectively! I decided to jot down the pluses and minuses of both sports. After adding up the score for each one, I'd embrace the winner!

Pluses and minuses flew onto the paper. But one column kept getting longer and longer! As you probably guessed, cheerleading was killing trampoline. A lot more pluses sprang up on the cheerleading side than on the trampoline side. And it's no mystery why.

As cheerleaders we work together as a team. Trampolinists don't. It's solo performances all the way. Sprinkled in are the occasional synchro routines with two jumpers. But in reality, as a trampolinist, I was always pushing to score better than the athletes from the competing gyms...and the ones from my own gym, too! My trampoline friends morphed into competitors with every championship! It's totally different with cheerleading. Teammates are constant and uninterrupted friends—not just before and after competitions!

What's more, I connected with the total trust that exists among cheerleaders—sorta the cheerleaders' unspoken vow! After all, we

depend on one another to deliver “gold medal” performances. Nobody creates a pyramid solo! We also count on each other to ensure our safety during stunting. The flyers and middle-tiers in the pyramid need to trust that the bases will stay under them and be there to catch them when dismounting. Nobody wants to cheer to the THUD of a floor landing! Just as important, the bases have to be confident that the flyers and middle-tiers above them will stay tight and controlled. A flailing body toppling onto them—ouch! In short, it's the “we” among squad members rather than the “me” in trampoline that was the turn-on. Belonging to a cheerfam and all the other good stuff pumped up the cheerleading side and made it glow.

Even though cheerleading's positives were luring me, pulling that final “off” switch on trampoline was tough. I just couldn't let go! I had a history as a trampolinist, sort of like a family lineage. I didn't have this history with cheerleading. Every birthday party from 7 to 11 years old was celebrated at the gym on the trampoline! Trampoline medals were sprouting out of every drawer in my bedroom. Even my first email address was trampolinist22! I actually had business cards made up for “Trampolinist Mike”! I'd come to think of myself as a trampolinist. My friends knew me as a trampolinist. The whole world had come to associate the trampoline with me! Now I'd have to drop my old identity and assume a new one. Must be the same tough ride for people who change their identities in government witness protection programs! A tough, tougher and toughest choice...all rolled into one! One that left me mentally exhausted. But, I knew what I had to do...and I finally did it!

Once I bounced out of the world of springing surfaces and entered the “cheerleading side,” I immediately regained my senses! No more hyperventilating! I was cool! I was swinging again! When I look back now, I'm not sure why I worked myself into such a frenzy over making this decision. Especially when the decision to embrace cheerleading was right all along! Cheerleading's THE sport! Cheerleading rocks!

Better yet, once cheerleading became my sport, the whole college application process became more focused and manageable. No longer a decision zombie, my life hummed again! Cheerleading both headlined my college sports list and finished it, too! This was my sport! This was the college team for me. Since Harvard University's cheerleading team rocks, it was a no-brainer. If accepted, my #1 goal lit up to sunglasses necessity...making the cheerleading squad! The Harvard Club of New Jersey supported me as an aspiring cheerleader as well. During my college interview, Mr. Bernie Gross, my alumni interviewer, asked me about my cheerleading aspirations. He was curious about how gymnastics and trampoline had prepared me for this college sport. I was at no loss for words in explaining!

One “now” suggestion—start recording video clips of your stunting, tumbling and other athletic abilities. In my admissions



Performing a Back Full on a Trampoline at Nationals

packet, I included a video of me performing a trampoline routine taken at a national competition. The clip demonstrated to the admissions office that I capably performed the moves that give cheerleading routines their visual kick.

And there's more good news! The zillions of hours I'd spent training as a trampolinist weren't wasted. I'm flexing those aerial moves while navigating as a flyer! That reminds me. Every cheerleader should spend time bouncing around on a

trampoline. Why? For me, jumping on the trampoline and defying gravity gave me practice on controlling my body under all circumstances. While in space, it taught me how to morph into ideal form, too. Staying tight when performing moves on the trampoline's springing surface is also a cheerleader must-do!

As cheerleaders, our need for a diverse group of athletic abilities is sharpened and enhanced with cross training. Don't like trampoline or gymnastics? Go out for another sport! The benefits of cross training for cheerleading aren't limited to any particular one. Surfing like Lady Gaga or bungee jumping like Justin Bieber will do just fine! Or try skiing or rock-climbing or skateboarding. Follow your instincts! Regardless of the sport, new skills are acquired that boost our cheerleading abilities. Cross training helped me increase my physical strength and flexibility. Hey, my tennis training came in handy by increasing my stamina and quickening my reflexes to cheetah speed. Of course, I try to forget those scorchingly hot practice days when I thought I'd melt into the court!

Once a cheerleader, I also discovered some of the not-so-obvious aspects of our sport! As starters, cheerleading has lots of dimensions besides winning or losing. Consider this! Unlike other sports, although leadership is paramount to them as well, they have to be more keyed into scores. Fortunately, we don't zoom in, focus and remain fixated on scoreboards or points! When football players exit the field after a game, they're either on the top or bottom of the scoreboard. When we leave the playing field, we've brought a slew of positives to the game regardless of the final outcome. If our team wins, its "Yo, team! Victory rocks!" But if our team's fortunes plunge and they're slaughtered, we've still saturated the game with school spirit. We've still brought out the best in the players and the fans. Aren't we the ones who, sort of like pressure valves on steam boilers, keep the mood of the game upbeat and keep tempers from exploding?

And, regardless of the score, we strut our stuff with awesome stunts and routines! Even when we're competing, it's not strictly about winning! At cheerleading competitions, I've been blown

away by the sense of connectedness all of us have to each other. My most memorable flashbacks of the National College Cheerleading (NCA) Collegiate Cheer and Dance Championships held in Daytona Beach aren't about my team's point totals. It's about the happening events on the program's last day. That's when the teams walk along the beach, hang out and stunt with cheerleaders from other teams. With the sparkling blue waters of the ocean and sandy beaches as our backdrop it just doesn't get any better!...it's an overall blast!...it's cheerleader chill time!

We exchange helpful pointers and talk about new routines our teams are planning. Meeting cheerleaders from virtually every state, including the Aloha state, is totally awesome! I still use the skills I picked up at Nationals to enhance my stunting.

There's simply no other sport that tops cheerleading. "Our sport is ALL good!" And obviously, the word about cheerleading is spreading like wildfire...a Twitter explosion! There are over 6 million cheerleaders worldwide, and our number is zooming higher! Each year, when Pop Warner Pee Wee and Midget, elementary, middle school, high school, college, competitive and intramural cheerleader numbers are added up, our ranks keep expanding.

Which reminds me! To the non-cheerleaders with me now!... here goes!

"Come on in! Catch the fever! Crank up your cheering engine! Crush the competition! Push our numbers to over the 7 million mark!"

...

"Come to think of it, why stop at 7 million? Let's keep growing until we reach the 8 million mark. Or 10 million, hmmm or 20... or more!"

...

"Cheerleaders worldwide are here to help! If you're still sitting on the fence, here's one for you from those of us on the inside!"

Move your body! Shout it out!
Cheerleaders blast what it's about.
Don't know the stunts—or the cheer zip?
Follow us, and let it rip!

This fireworks explosion in our cheerleading ranks resonates way beyond our fifty states. Get this! When the World Cheerleading Championship started a few years ago, only three teams competed. Two years later, 38 teams from 15 countries jumped in. Shoot ahead to now and this number continues to grow. At last count, over 70 nations belong to the International Cheer Union World Championship!

And the news gets even more awesome! Our sport is on its way to the Olympics! One of the first steps towards this goal was our getting an official pre-Olympic cheerleading organization. And we now have one. It's the International Cheer Union. Super!

The gates have been opened and the remaining obstacles to inclusion can be addressed...and conquered! It's only a matter of time before we get to bunk at the Olympic village with the other world athletes. Can you imagine how cool it's going to be hanging with the other international competitors! Fantastic living quarters! Flavorsome food! First-rate work-out space! Fabulous friendships! Bring it on!

By the way, at the 2008 Olympics held in Beijing, China, 200,000 Chinese citizens were trained with basic cheerleading skills to whip up spirit at the games. Teams from every participating country could have these volunteers rev up their athletes and fans. Although only temps, being in our cheer zone embodied these novice cheerleaders with the universal giving spirit that breaks loose in all of us. None of the volunteers voiced hesitation in cheering for athletes from competing countries. When a news reporter asked one if she felt uncomfortable cheering for another country's team, a "No!" was shouted out loud and clear! Voiced like a true cheerleader!

For the 2012 games in London, cheerleading's not getting an invitation. The only new sport to make the roster is woman's boxing. With the 2016 summer games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,

softball and baseball fans will be disappointed! Those teams got the pink slip to clean out their lockers...permanently! This leaves two vacancies for other sports to squeak into. Unfortunately, again, cheerleading isn't in the running. Why? Because our sport isn't recognized by the International Olympic Committee!...at least not yet! Too bad! Instead, it looks like rugby sevens and golf are replacing the chopped sports. Cheerleading's gonna have to wait for the next selection round.

Hey, I'm sure cheerleading's on its way to Olympic status, but the wait better not take on Rip Van Winkle proportions.

One, two, three, four...all the way to 30 YEARS cycled by before bicycle motor-cross (BMX biking) made it! Another reason to vigorously push our sport ahead! When we finally gain inclusion onto the prestigious Summer Games roster, I'm game to try out for first team...well, maybe coach it!

Another recent cheerleading development is also lighting up the gyms! Competitive and elite squads may be renamed for more kick value. One athletic group wants cheerleading called "stunting" while another is lobbying for "acrobatics and tumbling." Either name sits fine with me. That's because either of them, one given by USA Cheer and the other by the National Collegiate Athletics and Tumbling Association, ensures us more recognition and more financial support. It's a win-win "name" situation!

Linked to our name change is the push to elevate cheerleading to a full-fledged college varsity sport. Keep it coming! At many colleges, cheerleading's a junior varsity sport or part of a spirit program. Recognition as a varsity sport is a reality at only a few schools, including mine. Every year spent on the Harvard team results in a minor H, designating junior varsity status. Four minor H's morph into one major H! By my cheering all four years, its varsity letter time—a BIG H—at graduation.

In addition, as more and more programs gain varsity status, more scholarship money heads our way. Some colleges, like the University of Maryland, already have signed on to giving cheerleading

scholarships. Like our push for Olympic inclusion, let's push for routine athletic scholarships for cheerleaders at all colleges! Why not! Financial reasons should never prevent someone from joining the team. As well, with greater financial support, we could refocus our fundraising efforts towards supporting local soup kitchens, homeless shelters and other community projects...not team travel, skills camp and gear expenses.

Finally, we get to my pet peeve. Cheerleading character assassination! With the over-the-top leadership face of cheerleading, it's annoying to hear uninformed chuckleheads bash our sport. Their ridiculous remarks sprout from crazy and inaccurate myths...myths circulated through websites, blogs, newsprint, television, movies and the grapevine. Although these venomous remarks are obviously not rooted in fact, they're definitely being spewed out there!

Unfortunately if something is said often enough, people begin to believe it...even stuff that's mere fiction! It's time to permanently get rid of ugly talk about cheerleading. Below are some of the most prevalent myths to be banished! Immediately! Hey, do we need to stage an international defense of cheerleading event?

Myth #1 "Cheerleaders aren't athletes!"

How lame can you get?!? This is the most knuckleheaded myth of all! I can't believe cheerleading isn't recognized as a "true sport" by some! I hear uninformed bores snidely remark that it takes no talent to yell out catchy phrases like, "Defense! Defense! Defense!" and "Here we go Crimson, here we go!" Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Cheerleading involves a lot of athletic fitness and ability. In fact, competitive cheerleaders exhibit the ultimate in complex gymnastics and tumbling performed in sync and with crisp presentation.

And consider this. Cheerleading season typically extends from September to March. These seven months, encompassing football and basketball games, give cheerleading one of the lengthiest sports seasons. In addition, for squads that enter cheerleading competitions, the season extends into April. No doubt, besides our athletic

ability, we possess extraordinary stamina and endurance. In fact, cheerleading is one of the most difficult sports there is, comparable to football, soccer, basketball and others with grueling schedules.

And this is no exaggeration! Check this out! A Princeton University graduate, Kewku Nduom, who was a college cheerleader and sprint football player, considers cheerleading more difficult than football. From his point of view, “If cheerleading were any easier, it would be called football.” Go, Kewku!

Myth #2 “Only girls are cheerleaders!”

Another crazy myth! Fact is, cheerleading teams welcome guys—hey, aren’t I living proof! In fact, not only are girls and guys welcome, but, unlike other sports, we’re both welcome on the same team. Although there are all-girl teams and girls outnumber guys in the sport, many all-girl recreational, middle school, high school and college cheerleading teams are transitioning to coed squads. And, as unbelievable as it sounds, the first cheerleading teams in the early days of our sport were all male!

Myth #3 “All cheerleaders are petite!”

False! False! False! Why is it that when people think of cheerleaders, they immediately visualize a petite girl held up on top of a pyramid or being tossed in the air? And, when they do think of guys in the sport, they usually picture some muscular power-lifter at the base of a pyramid. Truth is, squads welcome and need many body types. Unlike sports such as cross-country track, swimming, or wrestling where athletes have to be a certain height or weight, with cheerleading, many more body types are welcome. Can you imagine a sumo wrestler running over 26 miles in 2 hours, 3 minutes and 38 seconds! Of course not, but that’s exactly what Patrick Makau of Kenya did at a recent marathon! He’s definitely not the body build of a sumo wrestler! Among women marathoners, Paula

Radcliffe set the record at 2 hours, 15 minutes and 25 seconds. It would be tough for her to compete in weight-lifting events!

Truth! Truth! Truth! It's athletic ability and not strictly body type in cheerleading! Cheerleading teams need bases, flyers, back spots, and tumblers. We're not a one size fits all sport! Look at me! I'm a guy flyer!

Myth #4 “Cheerleaders hang up their uniforms by age 23”

Not true! Now, although we're generally a young crew, there are people who continue to cheer indefinitely. Some cheerleaders first take up the sport as older adults, too! In fact, retirees can be counted in the cheering zone! Hmmm, maybe we should encourage our grandparents to jump in?

Senior citizens take on our sport not only for the physical benefits, but also to contribute to their communities. There's a group of cheerleaders in Japan, known as the Pompom squad, whose average age is 66 years. Now that's incredible! They cheer in children's hospitals and nursing homes. Way to go Pompom squad!

Myth #5 “Cheerleaders are not very smart and they're overly dramatic”

This one's an unbelievably damaging myth that has to be stomped out quickly! It's pure twaddle! This negative stereotype that cheerleaders are brain dead and, especially in regard to gal cheerleaders, are catty and over-the-top dramatists, is absolute insanity. It's the sort of myth likely circulated by hypercritical toads whose idea of exercise is flicking the remote!

Cheerleaders are not about eye candy! First of all, to be on a cheerleading squad, schools require that we keep up our grade point average. Slacking off isn't an option! According to the Cheerleading.org website, 90% of cheerleaders carry a B average or above in school! In addition, over 98% of high school cheerleaders are

aiming for college...and once they're enrolled in college and taking courses that rip students to shreds, cheerleaders still are required to maintain good grades. The US Military Academy website summarizes our high standards clearly—"cheerleaders have to maintain a C average or better to stay on the team." Sloths are simply not welcome...and will not last long in a cheerleading environment!

Now, because we're so highly visible on our school's teams, it's only natural that some non-cheerleading students will conjure up all sorts of ridiculous reasons to criticize our actions. Fact is, we're school leaders who inject infectious energy into athletic programs, pep rallies, and spirit events! But isolated news stories, like the one headlining 26 cheerleaders being stuck in an elevator (that was meant for up to 15 people) for almost half an hour, feed right into this negative image. TV and movies routinely assist in resuscitating this stereotype and pounding it into the public's heads by portraying cheerleaders as "mindless airheads" who constantly smear other students. Did you happen to catch the *Glee* episode when the cheerleading coach tells two of her squad members, "You may be two of the stupidest teens I've ever encountered..." Such lines are clearly invented for shock value and fail to give a true depiction of what's real! We're also portrayed as stabbing our own teammates in the back. Ouch! Not true!

So what's the real deal and not merely creative entertainment?

"It's this! We're contributors to and motivators of the sports world."

In addition, our influence in the non-sports world is also recognized by the non-cheerleading public. Have you ever noticed how often influential people are referred to as cheerleaders for their cause? Warren Buffett, an astute businessman, is often referred to as the unofficial cheerleader for the United States economy. By chance, at a convention center in Omaha, Nebraska, Mr. Buffett met the University of Nebraska cheerleaders while walking by their booth. Despite his full schedule, he took the time to take some photos with them! What a great photo op! What an unexpected opportunity to meet this "cheerleader" economist!

Myth #6 “We use unusual game day props”

Now, not all myths about cheerleading are widespread. I, for one, often meet people who blow me away with their crazy cheerleading statements. I have no clue as to how or why they came up with these “tall tales.” You’ve probably heard some harebrained ones, too! Let me tell you about this unusual one that was recently put on me.

Picture this—I arrive at my cousin’s wedding in Philadelphia on a fall afternoon. Most of the adult action is taking place inside, but I hang outside on the terrace with cousins and friends. I don’t head back inside until the ceremony begins. During the service, I notice that guests are occasionally turning their heads to glance at me, smile, and give me a thumbs-up. I have no idea why.

After the ceremony, several of them come over to congratulate me on being a cheerleader...asking to see photos, what practices are like and how I’m keeping up with cheering and my course work. Then, the moment they’ve been leading up to comes! They set up the question with an enthusiastic, “Mike, it must be great that you never miss a football game—lucky you!” And then, after another short pause, this mind-blowing comment that’s been bubbling up inside of them finally pours out. “By the way, how does it feel to be shot from a cannon during half-time?”

“What???”

I look back with disbelief! “I’ve NEVER been shot from a cannon!”

Culprit for this preposterous myth? My Uncle Tom! Apparently, Uncle Tom told every wedding guest he bumped into this tall tale. He described me as part of the “cannon” half-time entertainment at football games!

“There’s absolutely no truth to that, Uncle Tom! Cheerleaders are never shot from cannons!”

Can you imagine that???

In fact, many of you may have family members who, like Uncle Tom, are always willing to “help out” with cheerleading activities. My Uncle Tom is also “available” to teach me new and unsolicited

material! Every time he visits, he never fails to say, “Mike! Listen to the cheer I just thought of...think your team can use it?” And then he goes into a routine that doesn’t quite look like any cheerleading routine I’ve ever seen. Uncle Tom cups his hand as if holding a megaphone and yells out his cheer, while stomping his feet. His cheers usually date back to when he was in school or is one that he’s modified from that time period. Picture my Uncle Tom performing this cheer while we were shopping in the Harvard bookstore, “The Coop.” And, imagine my embarrassment!

Boston tea party,
RAH RAH RAH,
Texas cactus,
RAH RAH RAH,
We play your team,
RAH RAH RAH,
Just for practice,
GO, GO, GO!!!!

I constantly remind Uncle Tom that cheerleading is a lot more than catchy phrases and foot stomping. He also forgets that our competition routines are performed to music and not cheers! But despite the myths Uncle Tom perpetuates, he does love cheerleading! He’s been at many of the games and competitions where I’ve cheered. Thank you, Uncle Tom. But, please, keep your cheering inside stadiums and gyms! Not bookstores!

Let’s leave cheerleading myths behind and move on to truths. I consider these cheerleading truths our cheeriac “kudos!” Why kudos? Because kudos means “praise for exceptional achievement!” And that’s exactly what cheerleading’s all about. In fact, some of our kudos are unique and apply only to our sport and no other one. Here’s the list I came up with! Can you add a few more?