



NEWS RELEASE

IMPROVED WORK ETHIC HELPS SPIRITLINES IMPROVE AT RAYMOND S. KELLIS

PHOENIX, AZ (Sept. 19, 2009) – Anyone who thinks that high school spirit lines are not athletes should attempt to go through one of the workouts at Raymond S. Kellis in Glendale.

Due in part to the conditioning program instituted by Rebecca Lehman in her first year as coach in 2008-09, the Kellis team went from a non-contender into a group that finished second overall in the Class 4A Division II championships.

This year, the team is looking to become even better.

“When we won last year, we were really excited. We were so nervous going into it. But when we did as well as we did, it was crazy how happy we were,” said Shauntel Sussex, who returns as a senior this year and is one of three captains along with senior Brittany Popow and junior Brittany Trenasty.

“Now we need to work 10 times harder and we know coach will be pushing us even more.”

Many people don’t realize how hard the cheer and pom members work, Sussex said.

“They think all we do is kind of just stand on the sidelines, but it’s much more than that,” she said. “They say, ‘You’re not athletes.’ Well, we are athletes.”

There are cheer and dance (pom) routines, and the all-girl stunts, which feature the top five squad members. Some of the divisions have co-ed stunt competition. The stunt competition involves strength, lifting and balance.

When Lehman first showed up, the adjustment was a bit difficult.

“She said, ‘All right, let’s go running.’” Sussex recalled. “We were thinking, ‘Are you serious?’ But she was serious and we got serious. We all went out as a team and took tumbling classes . . . and we’re doing it again this year.”

Said Lehman: “It’s amazing and exciting to see how far they’ve come. They want to change the way people view them. They want this to become a sport.”

Lehman said there are 25 girls on the varsity cheer squad, 15 on the pom and 15 cheer members on the junior varsity. According to a survey by the National Federation of State High School Associations taken earlier this year, approximately 400,000 students (girls and boys) participate in cheerleading.

Lehman, who participated in cheer and dance at her alma mater, Glendale Mountain Ridge, lets her team know the importance of academics.

Red and yellow cards are handed out to those who are having difficulty in the classroom. Only one warning (yellow, below a C) is allowed, and a red means the student is not passing the class and will not be able to compete or perform until their grades have been raised to a sufficient level.

Has Sussex been handed one of those cards?

She answered with an emphatic “No!”

“Coach definitely wouldn’t like it, and neither would my mom,” she said.

“We work as hard as we can in the classroom, too,” Sussex said. “I like math and I’m pretty good at that, but science and history can be a challenge, so I have to make sure I study whenever I can. Coach is doing it the right way -- academics first and then cheer.”

The cheer and pom lines also have bonded by holding car washes and other fund-raisers.

“We want the girls to be as well-rounded as possible,” Lehman said.

Routines are done at athletic events, in part to have fun and in part to prepare the girls for regional and state competition. Regionals are in mid-November, and this season’s state championships will be Jan. 30, 2010 at Tim’s Toyota Center in Prescott Valley.

“Our school has been open only about six years, so cheerleading is still developing. We want to be considered one of the best every year, but we have a lot of work to do. This is just the beginning of the journey,” Lehman said.

Have a Story Idea:

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