



During the 2013 Homecoming game on Sept. 27, varsity cheerleaders stand on their stools. This year's team has four senior members and two juniors. Last year's team had two seniors. In recent years, the team has struggled to keep upperclassmen.

CHEER

UP

Cheer team struggles to keep upperclassmen due to time and money commitment, strict rules

BY ELIA CHEN AND MANASA SANKA | ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY ALAINA LUI

On the spirit team's senior night last year, as seen in a video of the night on Elestoque.org, only two senior cheerleaders stood on purple stools marked "2013," while the team stood stock still and attentive, smiles frozen on their faces. This was no accident: by that time last year, only two seniors remained on the cheer team.

In recent years, the cheer team has suffered from a shortage of upperclassmen. This year's cheer team has four seniors. Last year's had two. And of the eight sophomores who cheered last year, only two returned as juniors this year.

The struggle to keep athletes through their senior year would hurt any team. They lose experience. Institutional knowledge. And, according to multiple sources, it affects

the team's unity and confidence.

Long season, tough rules

Time commitment and money are two reasons some upperclassmen are walking away from cheer. According to two current cheerleaders, participation on the team requires more than \$5,000 for outfits and competitions and requires hours for practice and games.

"We cheer every game, even away games, for football and basketball," varsity cheer captain senior Sara Posada said. "And we have practices for various competitions two or more times a week."

"Cheer becomes your life," said one current cheerleader, who asked that we not use her name because she worried it would

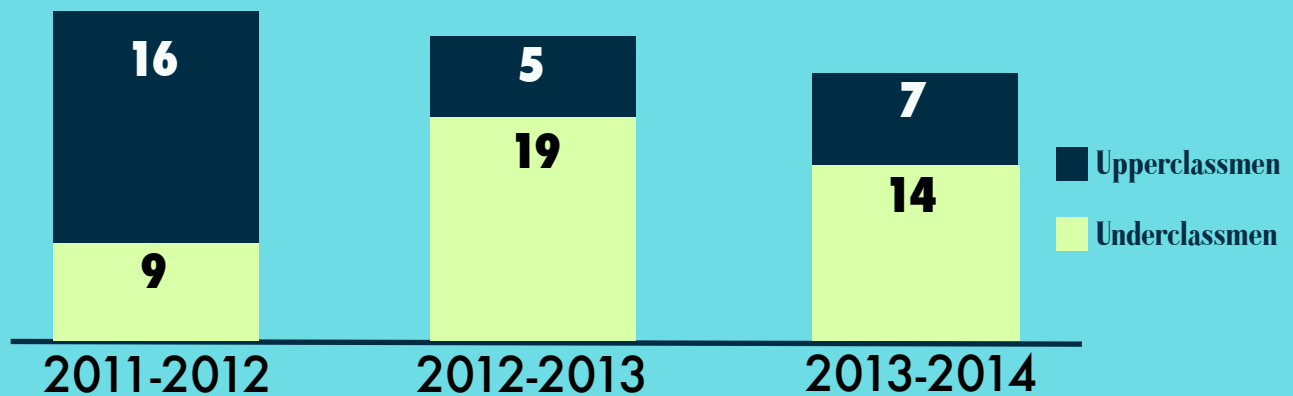
hurt her team.

For MVHS cheerleaders, the season is basically year-round with tryouts occurring in April and the final competition, Nationals, occurring in March. This has led some team members to question what they might be missing out on. The source above speculates that some other FUHSD schools do not face the same problems with team members quitting because of time since Lynbrook is in the Novice division and Cupertino does not compete.

"I dropped [the team] so that I could take advantage of senior year and try a bunch of new things," former cheerleader senior Zoe Heringer said, "to figure out what I am really interested in for college and life."

But other members who have quit the

A wave of change



team attribute the team's high turnover rate to the team's rigidity and strict rules for behavior.

"When we practice, the atmosphere is really tense and stressful," said another former cheerleader, who asked that El Estoque not use her name because she remains friends with current team members. "It's not happy and fun."

Cheerleaders are not permitted to move on their stools during games, according to current and former team members, and they are instructed not to interact with friends in the stands before and after games. Hence, several cheerleaders consider MVHS' team relatively strict compared to other schools' teams.

However, many remaining cheerleaders view the team's expectations as reasonable and think that the cheerleaders who quit should have expected the rules to maintain the team's image — after all, MVHS portrays the cheerleaders as "represent[ing] the school in many different ways," according to the spirit website.

Because they "represent the school," their social activities are monitored by their coach, according to multiple sources. Varsity cheerleading coach Brittany Morales did not reply to several requests to comment for this story. The unnamed current cheerleader above believes this is why many opt to quit the team: to gain more freedom with their social lives.

"[Morales] just says [the things she does]

because she wants new people to know that we have a reputation to keep up and she doesn't want people on the team to give off a bad impression," she said. "Certain things like people drinking at a party... she doesn't want that."

According to Heringer, the penalties for breaking the cheer team's rules may include being removed from the team or losing one's place during a game or performance. Most

I DROPPED... TO FIGURE OUT WHAT I AM REALLY INTERESTED IN FOR COLLEGE AND LIFE.

senior Zoe Heringer

often, however, the cheerleaders do not face any consequences because Morales warns the cheerleaders beforehand, and they listen.

"[Morales] just wants to make sure that all her cheerleaders are behaving properly [and] setting a good example," Posada said.

The show must go on

The cheer team's high upperclassmen turnover rate leads to a

variety of negative consequences for the team. Ideally, the team would like to maintain nearly 30 members each year to stay at their current competition level, according to one source. But high turnover means less experience, and new team members must learn choreography and stunting technique quickly.

"There [used to be a] lot of old members, [so] our stunts became really advanced really quickly because there was only one new person per group," one current cheerleader said. "This year there are sometimes even three new [members] per group, which takes up time to teach them."

However, though it takes time to train new members, she is confident that the cheer team will not move down a division because the new people understand how important winning is to the team.

"The team goes on as it usually would," she said. "[The possibility of moving down a division] was a threat, a warning to work harder from our coach, what could happen to us."

Whether they leave to save the money, the time, or to pursue other interests, each year, those who quit affect the team that remains.

"It seems like they are really selfish," the current cheerleader above said. "But obviously it's a really hard decision for the people who quit, too."

e.chen@elestoque.org | m.sanka@elestoque.org