

Acing Your Audition

- Tips From an NBA Director

by *Shella Satler, Director, Dallas Mavericks Dancers*

The audition process can be a very intimidating and confusing experience for anyone, even for dancers who feel as if they have completely prepared in every area. I have had between 300-500 dancers audition for the Dallas Mavericks Dancers for the past nine years. Many of these dancers have trained and prepared for the auditions at my studio, The Dallas Power House of Dance. I am asked over and over again by dancers auditioning, "What do I need to do to make it?". It is a very hard question to answer because there are so many variables involved in the selection process. I can only pick 18-20 dancers per season. I need the complete package in every dancer who makes the team. This includes confidence on and off the court, dance ability, exceptional appearance, and a "special spark" that makes basketball fans want to watch them.



The Preliminary is the toughest audition round because there are so many dancers to look at in a very short amount of time. If a dancer doesn't catch the judges' eye immediately, it is likely she will be overlooked in the first round. The focus of the first round is the overall look or appearance of the dancer. This includes the outfit, weight, hair, facial expressions, body proportion, confidence, showmanship, and the overall appeal the dancer portrays during the thirty seconds she has in front of the judges. It is quick round, and the first impression is very important whether or not a dancer will make it to the second.



The focus of the second round is the overall look of the dancer *plus* her dancing ability. The judges are watching how quickly a dancer can pick up the routine and if she is able to perform it with confidence. If a dancer has all the moves down perfectly but has a blank expression, she will likely be cut during this round. They are looking for dancers who can perform and create excitement to 20,000 fans. I can teach dancers how to move but I cannot teach a dancer how to feel the movement using power, dynamics, and energy. I don't have a long enough training period for that. I need dancers that can already put forth the internal power in every movement.



The focus of the third round is to concentrate on which dancers have the complete package: the appearance, the dance ability, and that "special spark" needed to entertain 20,000 fans. This round is easier because the dancers are getting tired and you begin to see who naturally "has it" and who could fake it in the beginning rounds. Someone who naturally has the "special spark" does not lose it over time. No matter how tired they are it still continues to shine. The NBA season is very long and intense. Like the players, the dancers must have the endurance and stamina to stay on top of their game all season long.

The final training camp is a week long. The finalists learn routines, participate in practice sessions, and go through an individual interview. This enables me to see how the dancers work together as a group. I also can determine if a dancer has an attitude problem or is lazy. The finalists are interviewed during this week to demonstrate how they should speak and act during public appearances and radio and television interviews.

After all of this, the 18-20 are chosen. It is difficult to make any NBA dance team due to the small number of dancers selected. The Dallas Mavericks Dancers need a group that has variety to appeal to every fan in the stands. Once the dancers are picked, then the real work begins and continues until the end of May. The Dallas Mavericks Dancers have been rated number one in the NBA for four straight years. They are celebrated and recognized for their dance ability and beauty.

No matter if you are auditioning for the Dallas Mavericks Dancers or any other professional dancing job, the audition process is very similar. Confidence is one of the key elements to go into any audition. If you believe in yourself, then the judges will believe in you also. If you seem meek and unsure, then the judges will be unsure if you can do the job. I know I am very impressed with dancers who enter the audition with confidence and certainty. It makes me feel like I can depend on them and trust them to get the job done. Recognize your strengths and play them up when auditioning for any job. Remember, don't try to copy what other people are doing around you. You will stand out using your own individual flare.

