

Contest Season

- Heaven or Hell?

by Kay Lynn Renfro, Director, National Champion Grapevine High School Fabulous Fillies

"Competition is easier to accept if you realize it is not an act of aggression or abrasion. Whatever you want in life, other people are going to want, too. Believe in yourself enough to accept the idea that you have an equal right to it."

--Diane Sawyer, television journalist

As a director, do you ever wonder why you put yourself through so much professional and personal stress in order for your team to participate in a contest? Are we in competition for our team's success or for our personal success? As coaches, we all want our teams to be successful in the competition arena but for true success to actually occur, we have to first understand our own personal and team agendas behind competing.

*Every team prepares...
Every team performs...
Every team desires...*

As we prepare ourselves and our teams for contest each spring, what priorities are your team members setting for themselves? We have to remember that as directors and coaches one of our duties is to realistically prepare our team for the outcome of the contest. At any competition, in any arena, it is the performance of the moment that counts. We have to remind both ourselves and our teams that the results are based upon the opinions of the professional judges. Each person has to accept the idea that all teams have an equal right to compete and that every team has the ability to be successful. On any given day a team could have its best performance, but there is still the chance for another team to be better.

John Milton states in Paradise Lost that we can "make a hell of our Heaven, or a Heaven of our hell." Many times in determining our team's success, we tend to focus on the outcome of the competition, when in actuality it is our leadership nature that ultimately makes our teams successful. It is the nature of competition that keeps every team striving for success, but even successful teams can falter. What results do the team members want in order to consider themselves successful? What results do you want in order to consider the team successful? Our acceptance--or even our lack of acceptance--of the competition results determines our team's attitude toward its achievement.

In order to truly have a successful competition season, compete for the positive results that come with teamwork and camaraderie. These are the ideals that need to be reinforced daily in practices. Take the good and the bad moments of practice and build on them by turning the negatives into positives. Is it just the performance or is it the interaction of the members that makes a team successful? If the interaction of the members is positive, the performance exudes the positive influence. If the interaction of the members is negative, then the performance is adversely affected. As a coach, if you work to build not only dance technique but also the camaraderie of the group, you and your team will have a very successful competition season.

