

HOW TO MAKE THEM KICK HIGHER AND BETTER!!!

UHSAA

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High Kicks have been around for many years and along with Military they are the foundation of the Sport of Drill Team. Nationally Texas coined the phrase of the "Texas T" as the popular stance for kick line prep showing off the perfect line of each girl's leg. Tyler Texas "Apache Bells" just celebrated their 55 year anniversary and they still perform amazing traditional kick routines with their 55 to 100 members and here in Utah we think a 25 member team is big. Another very famous traditional high kick Dance/Drill Team is "Kilgore Rangerettes" from Kilgore Texas, both of these Texas Jr. College Teams still wear very traditional uniforms when performing their high kick routines. Both programs offer scholarships for their Drill Teams and the Apache Bells have their own dorm building. Dance/Drill is important to many Universities and use this to motivate your athletes to work hard.

As in dance, kick has many different styles and philosophies to go with those styles. All of them have to start at the beginning and that is conditioning and skill development. Attached are many contributions from renowned professionals in the Dance/Drill Team industry and from the above mentioned teams.

THE BASICS

CORE: Your dancer's core is from the shoulders to the quadriceps muscles. And includes your upper and lower abdominal muscles. This is the area that if well conditioned will make your dancers stronger athletes. When teaching kicks many coaches think that working the hamstrings are the most important muscle to condition but in reality your leg *is pushed by the hamstring, pulled by the quads and held up there by your abs and gluts.* All of those muscles need to be conditioned in sync.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: Sit ups, pushups, squats and lunges and weight training will help build your core strength. Put together a workout routine that you can do at every practice or at a separate workout. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KNOW THAT THE BEST CONDITIONING FOR THE SEASON IS DURING THE OFF SEASON. THIS WILL ELMINATE INJURIES AND ALLOW YOU TO DO MORE ADVANCED MOVEMENTS. DON'T EXPECT NOT TO HAVE INJURIES IF YOU START KICKING HIGH AT THE FIRST PRACTICE.**

SKILL PROGRESSIONS

POSTURE: *Must have good body alignment, shoulders down, chest lifted, chin up (not out), tight abs (pull the belly button into the spine). Hips square to the front, think about the core keeping it tight even when you start kicking. Stress that this posture needs to become automatic and they should not ever have to think about it. It is the same posture they are using in all of their other routines so work on it every day it is the basis of perfection.*

HOOK UP: *This is where you will get many different philosophies, so pick one that works for you and master it. The one that I feel works best in keeping the kick line tight and strong is "left over right under." Your right arm is under and behind the person to your right's left arm. Your left arm is in front of the person on your left's right arm. My philosophy is that your fingers should be closed and thumbs in. Your fingertips should be placed at the halfway point from the end of the shoulder to the neck. To keep the arms nice and tight during kicks, pressure should be put on the elbows of each girl, not the shoulder. Putting pressure on the shoulder will*

A. gives you a false sense of balance

B. pushes your team mate over

C. put the whole line off balance

D. the girls will have a tendency to grip the shoulder and fingers will spread making the line look sloppy.

Before you start kicking as a team you need to perfect your hook up. After teaching exactly how you want it done then do a two count up down exercise: Hook up 2 counts then slap down 2 counts. Start out in groups of four then

add on two girls until you do it with your whole team. Do this every day even after you have started to kick it is important that the "hook up" component of the kick is flawless. This also helps with keeping pin wheels straight!

FOOT PREP: *The foot prep is how you will execute the kick this may change depending on the choreography, but it helps if your team has a basic prep and sticks with it, they will only get better and cleaner. My favorite foot prep really doesn't have too much to do with the foot. It is a slight bend in the knee and then the hook up happens as the leg goes up. When you bring your arms up can change with choreography. My philosophy to the knee bend verses the leg back prep is that it is easier to clean bending knees than getting everyone's leg to match up behind.*

Head snaps need to be defined by your team's style and choreography. The attached information will allow you to look at many different philosophies, stretches, skill progressions and even choreography. I am confident that every coach will find something in this information that will help them become a better coach and help them teach their athletes good fundamentals of kicking. It will also give you information for good conditioning and injury prevention. This is a new category for the UHSAA and we want to give you as much information to help you all be successful in this new competitive sanctioned category. You may or may not agree with all of the philosophies but you don't have to. The contributors are noted in each article. I hope this will be beneficial!!

DVD clip: The following video clip is a group of Texas Drill All Star dancers demonstrating the Texas T and a series of different kicks. Notice that they kick heading for their nose and not their shoulder.

www. <http://www.danceadts.com> Is a wonderful website with a lot of coaching educational material compiled by Joyce Pennington. I am sure you will find something new and useful I did.

Joyce Pennington: My philosophy of the high kick is that stretching every day along with kicking across the floor are essential elements in getting the team's kicks at a consistent level by building strength and flexibility. The foot should be extended as soon as it leaves the floor, all the way to the peak of the kick, and back down to the floor. The leg should be fully extended with no bend in the knee. Feet should be closed on the preparation for the kick and not let the support foot fall behind the other foot. The body alignment should be as important to be 'pulled up in center' as it is for dancing. Hips should not lift; shoulders should not roll forward. The head should be right on top of the shoulders and should not pull forward on the kick. The leg should follow a center line of the body towards the nose and not to the side of the head or towards the shoulder. Gussie Nell Davis always equated the body to be that of a wasp: the movement only comes from the waist down and the upper body does not move. A kick line always looks better if all kicks are the same height instead of some kicking to the nose and others kicking lower.

The High Kick - A Vanishing Act? by Cathy Wheat

Having been a director for 25 years, I have seen trends come and go; One disturbing trend is the widespread demise of the technically correct high kick. Some possible reasons for this are improper instruction, inability to analyze movement, a lack of conditioning and a decrease in the time spent working on kicks by both the team and the individual.

The explanation of the mechanics of a high kick doubles as a checklist for analyzing the skill. The checklist should include:

1. Head remains in line with spine
2. Shoulders pressed down and back
3. Ribcage lifted
4. Pelvis parallel to floor
5. Movement initiates from hip joint
6. Kicking leg fully extended
7. Ankle extended
8. Supporting leg w/only a slight bend and kneecap forward
9. Supporting foot parallel
10. Feet prep together
11. Small prep
12. Leg lifted, not thrown
13. Leg lowered, not dropped
14. Kick at 12:00
15. Kicking leg flat against body
16. Stamina to maintain technique.

Numbers 1-4 on the checklist require complete control and stabilization of the head and torso. This is not possible without good upper body strength. Numbers 5-7 and 12-14 require muscular strength and endurance in the lower body. Numbers 6, 8, 9, and 15 require flexibility. Numbers 10 and 11 involve both strength and flexibility. Number 16 is cardiovascular endurance.

As directors we do our students a disservice if we require them to kick but don't provide them with the tools that allow them to perform correctly and safely. You must decide if you are willing to commit to the time that is necessary to develop strength, flexibility and endurance. This will be a team time commitment; we can no longer assume that the girls will spend the necessary time on their own. Unfortunately the majority of girls today so not possess that type of work ethic.

The following is a time table that I have found to be effective:

Off Season

- Stretching—30 to 45 minutes daily (does not include warm up)
- Strength—15 minutes daily (squats, walking lunges, standing leg extensions, pushups, sit ups)
- 45 minutes twice a week lifting weights

Endurance—45 minutes twice a week (power walking, aerobics)

- 45 minutes three times a week (kicking down floor, stamina kicks, full out kicks)

During Season

- Stretching—30 minutes daily (does not include warm up)
- Strength—15 minutes daily (same as off season)
- Endurance—45 minutes daily (stamina kicks and full out kicks)

Summer (two weeks)

- 2 hour session daily for stretching, exercises for strength and conditioning by kicking

To get your girls to value technique and height equally you must model this for them. Rewarding proper technique is your most powerful tool. I have found that the following suggestions work for my team... Do not allow the girls to kick above their waist until they can demonstrate the proper technique at that level. Let them progress to chest high, face high and full out. You must check them at each level before allowing them to attempt a higher one. Reward their efforts by assigning them to kick lines. Allow only those girls who have proper technique and height to perform a high kick. If you don't have enough qualified girls to make a kick line then continue to work and make the performance of a high kick a team goal. If you allow girls to kick without proper technique or height then why would they want to work it improve. Make it a privilege for your girls to be able to try out for Miss High Kick. Don't reward (or force) those girls who have not mastered the techniques. Last but not least (especially in their eyes) allow those girls who have mastered the skills to kick and stretch less in class. My team lives to "kick out". They try out for me and if they are good enough they can either sleep later or get dressed earlier depending on when our kick session occurs within the workout. Once the strength and flexibility have been developed less time is required to maintain them; have them do just enough to maintain their stamina and that in turn will maintain the other two components. Their incentive to stay in shape over the summer is to be able to "kick out" and therefore not attend our two hour kick session.

This is just a thumbnail sketch of what is involved in striving for properly performed and safe high kicks. This may not be for your team and that does not make them any less of a team. If you feel that your team needs to spend their time in other areas then your best decision would be to eliminate high kicks. Injuries are more prevalent when the body is forced to do something for which it has not been conditioned. Strength, flexibility, and endurance require adequate time and consistency.

High Kick Technique – An Elegant Tradition Incorporating Strength, Stamina, and Flexibility

Visualize the New York City Rockettes and the Kilgore College Rangerettes. What images come to mind?

The basic components needed to achieve a high kick are: Flexibility, Hip joint, Hamstring, Ankle

Cardiovascular Endurance: A high kick is a burst of energy that must look effortless. Each member must be committed to working out at least 3 or more times a week for 45 minutes. Activities can be riding bikes, running, aerobic classes, etc. during the off-season. Dance workouts should replace or coexist with these workouts during the year.

Muscular Strength: Upper body- Lower body-

Exercises for High Kick Flexibility

1. Active Hamstring Stretch- Lie down and extend one leg out. Support the back of thigh behind the calf or thigh. Starting with the knee bent, attempt to straighten knee until a comfortable stretch is felt in the back of the thigh by extending the leg into the air. Position lower back on the floor, grasp leg with both hands and pull gently toward the nose, not shoulder. Hold for 10 – 15 seconds. **Always relax when stretching.** Keep resting leg on the floor or bent, do not let it raise or dangle in the air. A partner can be used to hold the leg if needed, BUT, do not hold at the knee!

Additional stretches can include pointing, flexing, and rotating the **ankle**. Flex and point 4-8 times per leg. Rotate for at least 20-30 seconds each direction slowly.

Eventually, rotate the leg in the clock position to open the **hip joint**. Rotate one leg across the other and make a clock or counter-clockwise movement. Hold at the 11, 12 and 1 o'clock positions for 10-15 seconds. Partners help with this exercise! As in the stretch listed above, partners hold above or below the knee and gently push the leg toward the dancer. Their main job is to insure the supporting leg does not rise too high in the air during rotation.

2. Straddle Hamstring Stretch- Sit with your feet in a V or straddle position. To stretch the inside of your upper legs and hips, slowly lean forward from your hips. Be sure to keep your quadriceps relaxed and feet upright, not turned inward. As you lean center, find a position to hold and remain for 35 seconds. Keep hands out for balance and stability. Do not lean forward with your head and shoulders! This will cause your hips to move backward and put pressure on your lower back. If, when you lean forward, your lower back is rounded, it is because your hips, lower back, hamstrings, and groin are tight. To bend from your hips correctly, you must keep your back straight!

Variation: To stretch your left hamstrings and the right side of your back, slowly bend forward from the hips, toward your left foot. Keep your chin in and back straight. Hold a good stretch for at least 30-40 seconds. If necessary, use a towel to hold the stretch behind the heel of the foot. Focus should be on looking out or over the leg, not down, which will aggravate the tendency to round your back.

Variation: Reach across your body with the left hand to the right foot, putting your right hand out to the right side for balance. This will increase the stretch in your hamstrings and back, as far up as the shoulder blades and as far down as the hips. Do this across-the-body stretch in both directions.

Advanced Stretch- Reach over head with hand and grasp opposite foot. Keep your other arm resting close to your body in front of you. This is a good lateral stretch for the back and good for legs. Hold for 30 seconds. Do both sides. Do not overstretch.

Learn to hold stretch tensions at various angles. Stretches forward, left, and right, then teach yourself to hold stretches at angles toward left center and right center. Use the same leg and upper body alignment as previously described. Hold for 30 seconds.

Partner stretches can be helpful to encourage flexibility. While leaning forward, right, or left, push on the dancers lower back gently. Do not push at the mid-back, upper back, or shoulders, Hold for at least 30 seconds at each angle.

3. Muscles in Front of the Hip- Move one leg forward into the “runners stretch”, a lunge with one knee directly over the ankle. Your other knee should be resting on the floor. Now, without changing the position of the knee on the floor or the forward foot, lower the front of your hip downward to create an easy stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. This exercise is also excellent for lower back problems.

Variation: Turn the left hip slowly to the inside to change the area of the stretch. By only slightly changing the angles of stretch you are able to stretch many different, adjacent areas of the body, like the quadriceps and hamstrings. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. Focus can be looking over your shoulder and behind you to add a further stretch.

Hip flexibility- With your front knee directly above your ankle, shift your weight up onto the toes and ball of your back foot. Now hold an easy stretch with a fairly straight back leg for 20 seconds. Think of the front of your hip going down to create the right stretch tension. Use hands for balance. This stretches the groin, hamstrings, hip, and possibly behind the knee of the back leg. Hold 15 seconds. Do both legs.

Quadriceps muscle stretch- reach behind you with your right hand and grab the top of your left foot between your ankle and toes. Now slowly lower the front of your hip downward as you gently pull your left heel toward the middle of your buttocks until you feel a slight stretch. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. **Be careful if you have knee problems!**

4. To help stretch the front of the leg to Guard against Shin Splints: Place feet 8-10 inches apart, lean out with your arms and point the toes straight ahead. Keeping heels on the floor bend your knees and squat partly down with buttocks slightly pressed into the floor. Remember to keep heels on the floor and slowly lean forward on to the balls of the feet. Repeat 8-10 times.

Another exercise is called the “**foot pat**”. Sit in a chair, feet flat on the floor with your knees at 90 degree degrees. Leaving your heel on the floor, lift the ball of your foot and pat it gently. Gradually build up to numerous repetitions.

5. Standing Stretches for the Legs and Hips: Place your back flat against the wall with one heel fairly close to the wall. Hands should be placed against the wall for support. Lift one leg to waist level and hold for 10 seconds. A partner should grab the leg above the ankle or below the knee as the leg is raised in a battement position. The assistant should slowly push the leg toward the dancer’s nose, being careful to maintain their balance and not bend the supporting knee. Hold at the 12 o’clock position for 30 seconds. To help build quadriceps strength, have the dancer resist or push the leg down slowly. The assistant will resist and help to strengthen the leg as a resistant force. Switch legs and complete the exercise.

Variation- Stand facing the wall, bringing the knee up and lean back to get the foot placed on the wall. (This is important so that the heel is not jammed carrying the entire dancer’s weight.) Slowly sliding the foot up the wall until the knee is straight. Keep your back and supporting leg straight as the leg goes up the wall. As the dancer becomes more flexible, move closer into the wall. Bring the leg down by swinging it to the side.

Variation- **Using barres**, slowly bring leg onto the upper barre. Repeat the straddle stretch and then slowly slide out into the splits. Hold the stretch for at least 15 seconds. To change the stretch, bend at the waist toward the foot on the ground. The raised leg should remain straight but will turn to the inside as you bend over. Hold this position and stretch the hamstrings of the supporting leg. The knee of that leg should be slightly bent (1 inch) during the stretch to avoid too much strain. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds.

6. Leg and Groin Stretches with the Feet Elevated: A wall is very useful for stretching the legs, while you relax on your back. Start with your legs elevated and close together, with your buttocks about 3-5 inches away from the wall so that your lower back is flat and not arched or off the floor. It is possible to stretch your groin from this position by slowly separating your legs, with your heels resting on the wall, until you feel an easy stretch. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and relax. As this position becomes easier, slowly stretch further by lowering your legs. Do not strain. Remember to keep your buttocks 3-5 inches from the wall. If you are too close you will feel tightness in your lower back.

Variation- Put the soles of your feet together, resting them against the wall. Relax. To increase the stretch, use your hands to gently push down on the inside of your thighs until you feel a good, easy stretch. To isolate and increase the stretch in each side of the groin area, straighten one leg out.

Helpful Hints for Warm-Up and Stretching

1. Emphasize stretching everyday; include variety in the types of exercises performed.
2. Motivate with music and change the tempos throughout the stretch.
3. Be sure the exercises have been thoroughly taught to prevent injury.
4. Concentrate on all parts of the body. It is helpful to begin at the top of the body and work downwards.
5. Start standing and then sit for stretching. Avoid getting up and down for it wastes time during warm-up.
6. Allow sufficient time for warming up. This may vary but try to be consistent.
7. Introduce new technical aspects during warm-up. Go for triple and quad turns in the pirouette.

Some Tips from Stretching by Bob Anderson:

- Don't stretch too far, especially in the beginning. Get a slight stretch and increase it after you feel yourself relax.
- Hold a stretch in a comfortable position; the stretch tension should subside as you hold it.
- Breathe slowly, deeply, and naturally- exhale as you bend forward. Do not stretch to the point where you cannot breathe normally.
- Do not bounce. Bouncing tightens the very muscles you are trying to stretch. Stretch and hold it.
- Think about the area being stretched. Feel the stretch. If the tension becomes greater as you stretch, you are over-stretching. Ease off into a more comfortable position.
- Do not try to be more flexible. Just learn to stretch properly and flexibility will come with time.
- We are different every day. Some days we are more tight or loose than other days.
- You have control over what you feel by what you do.
- Regularity and relaxation are the most important factors in stretching.
- Don't compare yourself with others. Even if you are tight or inflexible, don't let this stop you from stretching and improving yourself.
- Proper stretching means stretching within your own limits, relaxed, and without comparisons.
- Stretching keeps your body ready for movement.
- Stretch whenever you feel like it. It will always make you feel good.
- People tend to spend more time on the first leg, arm, or area they stretch, and they usually will stretch their "easy" or more flexible side first. Because of this natural tendency more time is spent on the "good" side and less on the "bad" side. To even out the difference in flexibility in your body, stretch your tight side first. This will help you limber up considerably.

Cardiovascular Endurance is the strength behind the beauty. To achieve perfection, every high kick in practice **must be completed "full out"** or to its maximum height. "Marking it" will lead to a decrease in the amount of stamina required to complete the performance with showmanship. It takes energy to smile and add the nuances of "sparkle" to the routine!

Additionally, muscle memory is an important quality in rehearsing a high kick. The more times the dance is performed; it becomes rote, almost subconscious. The turning of the hips becomes more automatic, less awkward. The muscles receive their nerve impulses faster. Instead of receiving the messages from the brain, the impulses soon become fired from within the spinal column itself. Whether this is structural hot-wiring or a faster pathway is being discussed by kinesiologists. Regardless of the body's instrumentation, studies support the idea of a routine being practiced with legs extended to their maximum height.

Encourage your students to train all year. Cathy Wheat, a 25-year dance/drill director promotes the following timetable for her students throughout the year:

Off Season

1. Stretching- 30-45 minutes daily (does not include warm up)
2. Strength- 15 minutes daily (squats, walking lunges, standing leg extensions, pushups and sit ups).
Additionally, 45 minutes twice a week lifting weights
3. Endurance- 45 minutes three times a week (kicking down the floor, stamina kicks, fan kicks)

During the Season

1. Stretching-30 minutes daily (does not include warm up)
2. Strength- 15 minutes daily
3. Endurance- 45 minutes daily (kicking exercises)

Summer Practice

2-hour session daily for stretching and exercises for strength and conditioning by kicking

Muscular Strength is achieved by practice, practice, and practice. Before we begin the exercises for building our muscle tone, let's go back to the basics of a great high kick!

Basics of an Impeccable High Kick

A. Stance

Know your foot position. Is it in semi-third, first position parallel, feet together? Notice the hip placements if the right foot or the left is forward in stance. Hip alignment is crucial for the "home base" of a precision high kick.

Torso should be lifted with the chest up off of the stomach area. Correct posture is a must, not only for aesthetics, but also for more air volume in the lungs.

Arms must be straight and strong. The illusion is to be connected, NOT leaning or being supported on anyone. The build-up of arm strength is taken for granted in my opinion. It must be developed. Watch the dancers after a run-through all their arms plop down or slap at their sides. Insist that they hold their arms up for a while, not as punishment or torture, but as arm strength development.

Arm positioning is the right arm resting gently in front of the neighbor's left arm, or in slang, "right over left". Elbows must be straight, not locked. Fingers, especially thumbs, must be together and placed on the top of the shoulder areas. Chins are lifted with shoulders pressed down to elongate the neck.

B. Jump Kick Prep

Feet must remain together for the preparation. Dancers have a tendency to "wind-up" or pull back on their high kicks for extra length. This is a misnomer because the leg has further to travel and can cause the leg to be late in tempo. The key to a precision high kick routine is the prep. **To be together or in-sync, the dancers MUST jump together.** No matter how tired the girls become later in practice, they should jump together for timing.

An exercise to emphasize jumping with correct foot placement is to have each girl tape or imagine a box around her feet. It is helpful to have a line or marker for them to recognize visually their starting point on the floor. Practice jump kicking for at least 16 counts and close. Spot-check where each girl has finished her series. Is she on the line? Another option is to have a partner inspect the back of the line for pulling back by either the preparation or line tugging by performers. Next, have the girls switch off and visually help each other with corrections.

C. Lifted Leg Placement

Kicking demands a straight leg in a "shoe lace" upward movement. Many studio-trained dancers have a tendency to perform the battement in a turned out position. Practice step kick exercises to reinforce the mechanics of the movement.

The height of the kick should be aimed at the performer's nose, not the shoulder. The lifted leg should be the only movement initiated by the performer. In other words, arms, back, and head should remain in a stationary position. Have each dancer concentrate on initiating the movement from the hip. Once a performer achieves the body mechanics of the high kick, practicing cardiovascular endurance will help them maintain proper body form throughout a strenuous dance.

Toes become pointed immediately upon leaving the floor. The ankle does not break the line of the leg; it remains lengthened during the entire movement. Remember to reinforce with tendu exercises to reach the optimum amount of ankle strength and extension.

D. Supporting Leg Placement

The supporting leg will be slightly bent and the kneecap in a forward position on jumps kicks. This is the main variation on step or exercise kicks!

In my observations, most kickers slightly turn out their supporting leg. Do not overemphasize this component to your dancers; let them naturally determine the extent of the turnout. It should not be exaggerated.

E. Hip Placement

Hips should be square or equal when lifting the kicking leg. Many novices attempt to lift the hip thinking that they will elongate the leg line. Video your team members doing their exercise and jump kicks. They can identify their mistakes since most learners are visual ones.

F. Head Focus or Positioning

There are several schools of thought concerning headwork during a high kick routine. I prefer looking in the direction of the kick during the prep. Dancers instinctively turn their hips in the direction of the kick when their head turns on the prep. To me, the head look focuses the performer on the angle, height, and direction of the kick. Conversely, many schools turn their head on the kick to emphasize the sharpness of the head and leg lines. No matter what philosophy of head prep you follow, **BE CONSISTENT!** Train your performers from the beginning to practice together on the prep or on the kick. Make it a tradition and do not vary it from dance to dance, it will save you hours of polishing!

The Don'ts of a Jump Kick

1. Bending from above the waist
2. "Sitting" or bending from the lower back
3. Poor kick placement to the shoulders
4. Lifting hips
5. Sickled in or turned out foot
6. Shoulders lifting
7. Pulling back or reaching back on preps
8. Tempo off on height of kicks or preps
9. Pulling, pushing down or tugging on dance line
10. Bent arms and hands opened on shoulders
11. Poor endurance
12. Dropping kicks instead of controlling their release
13. Over jumping on preps
14. Headwork undefined or varied

Knowing how to do a good jump kick is important. PRACTICING one is ESSENTIAL!

Let's now discuss some combinations to build upon our foundation and increase **muscular endurance**:

Kick Sequences for Across the Floor

The cornerstone for building kick technique is called the **Exercise or Step Kick**. The fundamental difference in a jump and exercise kick's body alignment is the lower body placement. On exercise kicks, the heel remains on the floor and the supporting leg is straight to further battement flexibility. Picture the dancer making a split in the air, only the back toe is not pointed but flat on the floor. Leaving the supporting foot flat and the knee in a straight position maximally stretches the groin area. While the cardiovascular area is not developed, it is a good way to begin training for high kicks and slowly begins the acceleration of the circulatory system.

The **mechanics of the Step Kick Series** going down the floor are as follows:

Count 1- Step forward on the left foot and kick the right leg. Make sure that the left heel is completely flat on the floor.

Count 2- Battement the right leg utilizing all of the kick fundamentals listed above.

Count 3- Step forward on the right foot using a normal size step, not one that is exaggerated. The foot should be in a releve', not flat on the floor.

Count 4- Step forward on the left foot and it should be in a releve'.

Count 5- Step forward on the right foot but **PLANT** the foot with heel down in preparation for the high kick. Remember all of the kick basics such as straight leg and knee!

Step 6- Battement the left leg

Repeat the combination until the dancers have used all the floor space.

Additional Variations:

- On the counts that the girls hit the height of their kicks, have everyone on the team say HIT to focus on tempo. Besides being a tool to work on timing, it motivates the team and becomes fun.
- Begin the series only eye level for height to warm up the legs and fire the neural impulses. The second set down the floor can include the top level or highest point that the dancers can hit using correct technique. Remember, YOU set the tone of success. If needed, start the level at waist, then do eye and over the head.
- After the highest level of step kicks, add jump kick combinations to this exercise. Close on 8 and begin a jump kick set of 8. Repeat. Gradually build to add a jump kick set of 16, 8 counts of fans to the right, 8 counts of fans to the left and/or around the world kicks.
- Mark the jump kick series on a painted line to watch for traveling or pulling among the dancers.
- Exaggerate the releve' to build ankle strength and reinforce the mastery of the supporting heel being placed firmly flat on the ground.
- Travel solo down the floor to reinforce supporting the individual's weight alone, not leaning on a fellow dancer. It is much harder to jump kick alone than in a line while displaying correct technique.

We need to refine our line placement and work on keeping our form instead of traveling across the floor. To do this, we must introduce the **Exercise Kick** to our repertoire.

The **format for Exercise Kicks** is very similar to the step kick series. The difference is that we step back and remain in place to perform the sequence.

Count 1- Same as the Step Kick series.

Count 2- Same as the Step Kick series.

Count 3- Step back on the right foot in releve'.

Count 4- Bring the left foot back in releve'. Reinforce that its placement must be aligned next to the right foot. This will continue to remind the performer the importance of the feet being together or touching on the kick prep. The constant kinesthetic awareness of the rubbing or touching of feet will aid in a correct jump kick technique.

Count 5- Step forward on the right foot but PLANT the foot with heel down in preparation for the high kick. Remember all of the kick basics such as straight leg and knee!

Step 6- Battement the left leg.

Repeat for at least a 16 count series.

Elaborate the kick series by adding jump kicks and fan kicks in both directions. Utilize your visual cues by watching from the side, marking on a painted line, and using a video camera.

Another type of kick, the **Fan Kick**, is one of the most advanced ways to kick because the entire hip joint must be open and flexible. One leg is usually more rounded than another, so begin the girls working the left hip joint first in warm ups. The fan kick series is especially helpful in developing muscular and cardiovascular endurance.

To begin the combination, have the girls learn apart or spaced out, then connect to one line. Beginners usually need to turn their hips too much and the mechanics of learning are best if they have some room to perform the sequences incorrectly. After teaching the counts, have them connect into a line and practice in sync. Here are the basic counts of a right high kick sequence:

Count 1- Prep with feet together and jump.

Count 2-Begin the revolution of the hip joint and release the leg in a clockwise. Try to extend the leg to touch the girl on your left as you bring the leg up to 12 o'clock. The battement leg must be straight with the toe pointed. The

apex of the kick must be on count 2. Continue to bring the leg down, trying to touch the girl on your right and **keeping the movement circular**, not chopped!

Count 3- Prep again and repeat.

The left fan kick is identical in sequence, just reverse.

The mechanics of the jump kick apply to the supporting legs and arms. Generally, the dancers remain focused front and do not turn their head to the side. It is not necessary to travel to the right to perform a right fan kick. This is called traveling and can emphasize the motion of the kick, but is hard to complete with correct technique if not extensively practiced. Beware of “sitters” and exaggerated supporting knees by the participants. Additionally, arm strength tends to wane on many kicks during these combinations. **Work on practicing correct form and then go for height on the kicks.**

Some other types of kicks are:

Three Point Kicks- Kick the right leg across the body to the left, front, and then to the right. Some teams add on to the sequence by jumping facing back and repeating to the away audience.

Inverted Fans- Initiate the fan movement counterclockwise, instead of clockwise. In my opinion, it is best used visually by completing after a regular fan kick series. Very few dancers can keep the movement circular because the ankle has a tendency to sickle after two or three are completed successively.

Waist Spacing- One of my favorites on stage, waist high kick spacing, refers to the interval between performers. Instead of hooking up on the shoulder, dancers connect behind the waist with elbows bent in at the side. Right crosses over left, mimicking normal high kick spacing. The proximity of the dancers makes it tough to kick high in the beginning, but the look is striking with effective costuming.

Around the World or Star Kicks- Begin the combination as if completing the Three Point Kicks, kicking right across the body and right front. Add in a left kick to the front and then complete with a right kick to the right.

Hitch Kick- A staccato-like move that appears to push the leg higher by its reciprocal force. Place the left leg with the knee bent, parallel to the floor, in a passé type position on count &, Push the left leg down and at the same time, lift the right leg to its full battement position on count 1.

Y scale- Used in many stunts, a Y scale is a battement that is being held. Typically, the dancer holds her right leg in her right hand, while balancing on her left leg. Arms are usually in high kick spacing with the hand remaining shoulder level. The shape of the dancer’s body is typically like a Y, hence the name. Variations include the girl on the dancer’s right grabbing the leg and performing a stunt out of the trick.

Incorporating various kicks can add variety, difficulty, and interest into your repertoire. I would add the above series after a week of two of intensive rehearsals. Do not overwhelm your dancers with the various styles. Master the classic jump kick, fan and exercise kick, - the rest will become easier to attain.

Post a kick competition chart between squads. Earn stars for achieving “on the line” kicking during warm-ups, greatest improvement as a group on height of kicks, and best circular fan. **Be creative in your praise and diligent in warming the dancers up!** Some directors have a “kick line” that performs at special events and compete as an elite team.

Aspire to improve your dancer’s ability and challenge their desire to become a kick team.

Gussie Nell Davis and Kay Crawford will be happy you did!

Sources:

High Kick Techniques by Debbie Byrd

The High Kick – A Vanishing Act? By Cathy Wheat

Stretching by Bob Anderson

Things to Look for in Kicking by Barbara Lown

**This Ain't Yo Mama's Drill Team
Or**

Today's High Kick Choreography

By Mary Wendt

The building blocks of choreographing a routine are easy to discuss, harder to implement. A high kick is often seen as limited in form changes and style. We are about to break that barrier!

Let's touch on the basics of choreography. While we are looking at the fundamentals, we will brainstorm how these can be applied to high kick routines specifically. Additionally, we will supplement our discussion with videos of routines to visually highlight our ideas.

The Dance Form in Space or How to Break Down Choreography

A. Direction

Forward, Backward, Side to Side, Changing, Turning

B. Focus

Down and Up

Forward and Backward

Opposite direction of head and movement

Fixed

C. Floor Pattern

Straight, Curved, Circle, Broken Line, Combination, Asymmetrical

D. Level and Body Contour

Lie, Sit, Stand, Kneel, Crouch, Demi-plie or half stand, Full stand, Elevation

E. Dimension

Small or Tight

Medium or High Kick Spacing

Large or Spread Out

Combination

Gradual Change

F. Grouping

1. Number of Dancers

Solo, Duet, Trio, Quartet, Group, Combination

2. Arrangement

Line, File, Open Circle, Open Square, Concentric Circles, Double Line, Double File, Solid Mass

Relevant questions to ask about the Specific Dance Movements when looking at the videos:

Are the rhythm patterns and phrasing interesting?

Are they using the above dance FORM ideas?

Are the transitions logical in development?

Is the music UNIQUE for the dance?

Are there too many overused or frequently seen movements?

Is there a dynamic element in the dance to make it “theirs” or will everyone remember it in 2 hours?

High Kick Techniques *by Debbie Byrd*

A High Kick is either good or bad. There is no in-between! Before you kick for the first time, please read and re-read the "**DO'S AND DON'TS**"! The first time you do the following exercise correctly, you probably won't be able to kick as high as your waist. As you progress with your stretching exercises, you will gradually kick higher each time you try. Do not be a 'smarty' and try to push your kicks high the first time. You will injure yourself to the extent that you may never be able to kick high. The height of your kick will easily tell if you have really stretched as you have gone through the exercise program. It will positively tell, if you have not.

+ STEP FORWARD ON THE LEFT FOOT AND KICK THE RIGHT LEG.

+ STEP FORWARD ON THE RIGHT FOOT, STEP FORWARD ON THE LEFT.

+ STEP FORWARD ON THE RIGHT FOOT AND KICK THE LEFT LEG.

The rhythm is: STEP, KICK, STEP-STEP, STEP, KICK, STEP-STEP.

This kick exercise can be executed standing in place, rather than progressing down the floor. Beautiful and spectacular kicks are an exciting aspect of drill team, only if they are done correctly and with proper technique.

This should be done progressing down the gym, on a walk, your front lawn, or in your play room. (Be careful of furniture--it hurts both your furniture and your body!)

REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING

1. As you kick, your body must be straight and tall. Your body never bends from the waist up.
2. Every time you kick, you must keep your support leg straight. That means you cannot bend your supporting knee.
3. Every time you kick you must point your toes and keep them pointed from the time they leave the floor.
4. Every time you kick you must keep the heel of your supporting leg on the floor--the support heel never leaves the floor.

"DON'TS"

- DO NOT bend forward as you kick.
- DO NOT bend supporting knees as you kick.
- DO NOT bend the leg that is kicking.
- DO NOT let the supporting heel come off the floor.
- DO NOT fail to point your toes.
- DO NOT start kicking down the floor without taking the time to warm up.

"DO'S"

- DO keep your toe pointed on the kicking leg.
- DO keep the supporting knees straight all the time.
- DO keep the supporting heel on the floor.
- DO stretch before you kick.
- DO pull up your body as you kick.
- DO make sure your kick 'peeks' on seven counts (say, "hit" as the kick reaches the peak)

There are 15 points to watch for in good high kick technique

Foot closure, head position, shoulder position, posture, tilting pelvis, hip alignment, straight supporting leg, heel down, toe points, kicks centered, control, tempo, leg extension, height of kick, leg distance from the body.

If all these points are in good form and technique, you will have PERFECT kicks!!

TIPS FOR WARMING UP

Warming up is an integral part of everyday rehearsal. It is important that your warm-up be structured, correct and consistent, utilizing all parts of the body. Extra warm-up time may be needed for certain muscle groups if they are to be used in an upcoming routine (ex., kicks, head rolls).

The three main functions of a warm-up are: 1) to prepare the muscles to work, 2) to put the muscles through the range of flexibility needed in the actions to follow, and 3) to prepare the muscles for an increased output of strength. Some of your students may require extra warm-up time to increase their flexibility. You may need to write up a schedule for these pupils to do at home.

The following tips will assist you in applying good warm-up techniques and maximum results:

Have your officers "choreograph" a warm-up to popular music to use each day. Your team will find their exercises more fun. Change the music every 2 to 3 weeks.

- Make sure to exercise from head to toe (literally). Do not forget ankles, shoulders, head and neck, etc. These are areas sometimes overlooked but always very important.
- Remember that warming up is an injury prevention measure and cannot be omitted--ever!
- Be sure to stretch with good posture. Always pull up in the center of the body and stretch in straddle, pike and hurdle positions with a flat back, leading with the abdomen and not the chin or chest. Rounding the back will stretch and loosen back muscles instead of thighs or hips.
- Be sure that the legs do not roll in or out when in straddle or hurdle position. Knees and shoe laces to the sky!
- Stretch with toes flexed for 1/2 of the time and pointed 1/2 of the time. This will add extra stretch to muscles in the other parts of the leg in addition to the hamstring.

BASIC STRETCHING

Stretches should be a standard part of every drill team warm-up. When executed properly these exercises

can improve your team's overall performance abilities. The following stretching exercises are simple and can be performed by even the most basic beginner.

STRETCH #1

Sitting in semi-yoga or soles of the feet together, position arms over the knee. Bend forward stretching the lower back muscles. Repeat several times.

STRETCH #2

Sitting with legs straight forward and the knees straight but not locked. Bend the torso over the legs trying to reach the rib cage toward the thighs. Later, the hands can grab the ankles to aid in reaching greater flexibility.

STRETCH #3

Sit with the legs extended to each side. Bend to the side over one leg. Have the upper arm stretch side over the head and the lower arm can relax along the floor. Keep both hips (buttocks) on the floor.

STRETCH #4

As in the above exercise, bend over the leg, but rotates the torso to face the leg. The arms can reach over the leg and later try to reach beyond the toes.

STRETCH #5

Standing, cross one leg over the other and keep the toes pointing forward. Bend forward reaching the hands toward the floor stretching the hamstring muscles. Later grab the ankles and pull the rib cage closer to the thighs.

STRETCH #6

Standing fairly close to the wall and leaning into the wall, press the heels to the floor stretching the Achilles tendon and calf muscles. Later, after flexibility increases move further away from the wall.

Increase difficulty of stretches by 1) changing tempo and # of stretches; 2) change the direction of the stretch forward, to the side, backward, and diagonally forward; 3) combine different stretches with various directions.

EXERCISES FOR HIGH KICKS

Beautiful and spectacular kicks are an exciting aspect of dance/drill team. However, to be most effective, they must appear effortless in quality and still possess the burst of energy which they demand for execution. The following exercises are designed to increase the flexibility and strength of high kicks:

EXERCISE #1

Lie on your back, one leg extended, bringing the knee of the other leg close into the chest. Extend the knee, straightening the leg into the air. DO NOT hold the leg in back of the knee for fear you could strain the tendons that run in the back of your knee. Try to hold around the calf or upper thigh area. Using both hands to hold the leg, point and flex the foot 4 to 8 times, then repeat the exercise with the other leg.

EXERCISE #2

Sitting in a straddle position (open wide to sides). The torso should be up straight and keeping the knees pointing upward. The heels stay in place and the ankles flex as the knees lift. Then reverse the process and extend the ankles and the knees. The arm can be placed in any upward or side position. Be sure the arms and hands remain relaxed and free of tension. Repeat this exercise several times.

EXERCISE #3

Sitting in a hurdle position with one leg bent in front and the other extended forward and front. Keeping both hips (buttocks) on the floor, bend the torso forward over the extended forward leg, and then return the body to the beginning position. Repeat this exercise 4 to 8 times then change legs. The arms can start over

the head and go with the body as it bends over the leg.

EXERCISE #4

Sit in a double hurdle or "S" position (knees bent, one leg in front and the other in back). Keeping the back straight, raise the back leg bringing it to the side of the body. The leg will not go very high, but hold for 8 counts and return to the beginning position. Do 2 to 4 on one leg, and then repeat on the other side. The arms can be held out to the side when the leg rises to the side.

EXERCISE #5

Sit with one leg in front and raise the other leg into the air with your hand. Try to pull the heel as close to your face as possible. To bring the leg back down, bring it forward then bend the knee to fully recover the leg. Repeat this exercise 3 to 5 times, and then try the other leg. Later, try to perform this exercise without the use of the hand holding the heel.

EXERCISE #6

Standing facing the wall, bring the knee up and lean back to get the foot placed on the wall (you may need to work in pairs for this exercise). Slowly slide the foot up the wall until the knee is straight, keeping the back and supporting leg straight as the leg goes up the wall. As flexibility improves, move closer to the wall. Bring the leg down by swinging it to the side. This exercise can be repeated with the leg to the side and back as it is extended against the wall.