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Monday March 23, 2009

Winter guard group wants word to get out about sport

by [Charlotte Ferrell Smith](#)
Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Dressed in flashy costumes, they perform carefully choreographed dance and gymnastic movements to music while twirling colorful flags, rifles or sabers.

The Reflections winter guard group is new this year with a rigorous practice schedule and competitions coming up against teams in other states.

Team members and their leaders are working hard to make this sport more visible in West Virginia, where only a handful of such groups exist compared to hundreds in Ohio and Kentucky.

"Hopefully, the number of winter guards here will increase so we won't have to go to other states to compete," Jason Meadows said. "We want to get the word out that this is a sport."

Meadows and Paul Miller serve as directors and choreographers for Reflections. Weapons choreographer/technician is Maurica Richardson.

Performers include Cassidy Beaver, a sophomore at Hurricane High School; Sierra Burford, a freshman at Sissonville High; Vicky Elder, a freshman at Hurricane High; Samantha O'Neill, a graduate of Sissonville; Susan Oxley, a freshman at Sissonville; Kathryn Patton, a freshman at Hurricane; and Erica Strobel, a freshman at Sissonville.

"This is a well-rounded performance of theater, dance and drama with manipulation of equipment," Miller said.

Tough practice sessions are held regularly at the Dunbar Armory. Before picking up a piece of equipment, the girls run 15 laps around the gym, do 100 jumping jacks, stretch, and take a 45-minute dance class.

Participants say the hard work is worth it when they get the chance to perform.

While color guard performances are an auxiliary part of marching bands, these maneuvers are done indoors on a tarp on a gym floor and last beyond football season.






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"During marching season, I play trumpet," said Erica, who turns 16 in April. "I always wanted to learn how to do this. When this came up, I signed up. It takes a lot of time. I don't hang out with my friends as much. It takes a lot of effort."

However, she and the other girls say they love the challenge.

"It's a thrill to perform," said Kathryn, 15. "You learn how to be part of a team and you get listening skills. If you don't pay attention, you don't know what you are doing. It's like any other sport."

Susan, 15, added, "I've made a lot of friends. It's fun, but it takes a lot of effort. I'm learning a lot of movement and dance."

Cassidy, 16, loves the physical challenge and the stress relief the exercise offers.

"It takes a lot of hard work and stamina," she said. "When I first started, I used muscles I didn't even know I had."

Sierra, 15, said the routines are physically challenging and also take mental effort to remember all the details required to be part of a team performance.

"It builds strength and muscles in mind, body and spirit," said Samantha, 19.

For more information, go to the Web site
www.orgsites.com/wv/reflectionswinterguard.

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