

Sixth grader David Adams was the only boy on the cheer squad (Story by K. Spicer, captions by T. Morales)

Trying to memorize the routine, David Adams, a sixth grader, struggles to push his doubts and thoughts of disapproval. As the only boy on the team, others expressed doubts that he'd do well in cheer.

Adams wanted to do gymnastics first, but he changed his mind once his friend suggested cheer tryouts.

"On the Fourth of July, Jaila (Hamilton) told me I should do cheer," he said. "I thought about it and I realized it was a good idea."

During the tryout process, his dad tried to convince Adams to play football instead.

"It sucked that he didn't want me to," Adams said. "But my mom was nice about it."

Being the only boy made it harder for him to fit in at first, but it didn't last long.

"It was kind of embarrassing at the start," he said. "But it's fun now and I don't care."

He struggled to pull himself out of the mindset that he couldn't be successful but found the motivation to try something new.

"Sometimes you just have to do what you've got to do," Adams said. "And I did."

bold move

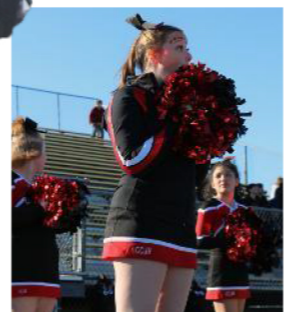


Getting Into It Rallying with the cheer team, eighth grader Jaila Hamilton yells to support the football team on Feb. 9. She said she's glad she's stuck with cheer, even though it's a challenging sport. "I wanted to quit a lot (because) cheer is very stressful," Hamilton said. It's a very fun experience. I like throwing people (and) being their bases." (H. McCrary)

Step Right Up Preparing for a stunt, eighth grader Celysia Redondo jumps up into her base's arms for support on Jan. 18. She said she'd had a lot of practice but is always careful. "Even though we've done it so many times, every time, a rush of excitement comes through," Redondo said. "I'm nervous that I might fall, but I have to focus on getting up." (K. Jolly)

Quick Fix Before the next play starts, AJHS cheerleader Bailey Brummer fixes seventh grader Cali Ruise's bow on Feb. 9. The bow is an essential part of the outfit, as it ties the team together. "My friends are always fixing my bow," Ruise said. "The bow stays straight for a while but always gets crooked later." (H. McCrary)

Watch With Interest Eighth grader Bailey Mohn reacts to the football game on Feb. 9. Mohn became interested in cheer because her sister also used to cheer. "I joined cheer because of my sister," Mohn said. "She told me to try it (and) I ended up really liking it." (H. McCrary)



The JV team allowed more athletes to get in the game (Reporting by R. Parris)



Break Free While breaking from a tackle from ALA Gilbert's defenders, seventh grader Kamran Kelly (2) tries to escape on Jan. 25. The team lost, 22-12. "I was stressed because he was trying to tackle me," Kelly said. "Being a running back is nerve-wracking because I don't want to make any mistakes." (R. Parris)

Coming at You Getting past one tackler, seventh grader Scott Moss (12) carries the ball down the field on Jan. 18. The Cougars JV team defeated Heritage Maricopa, 20-16. "I've been doing football since I was 6 because of my dad," Moss said. "I like football because you get to hit people and not get in trouble." (H. McCrary)



Hold Your Ground Blocking an ALA Gilbert defensive back, seventh grader Camden Thomas (10) creates room for the ball carrier on Jan 25. The Cougars lost the game, 22-12. "I've liked football since I was a kid because it's physical," Thomas said. "It's really stressful to me when we lose." (R. Parris)



A Dose of Courage Seventh grader Antonio Rivera (18) offers support to Nathan Hunt (61) during the JV loss on Jan. 25. "He's touching my shoulder and letting me know he's by my side," Hunt said. "I joined football to focus on how big and strong I am." (H. McCrary)

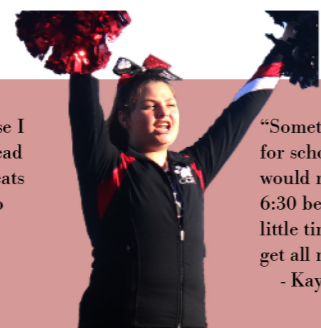


practice after dark

Most teams had practice right after school, but the cheer squad had theirs in the evening (Reporting by T. Morales)



"It does affect me because I like to chill at night instead of going out. My family eats at like 5:30, but I have to leave for practice."
- Shana Shine (8)



"Sometimes I don't have time for school or to get ready. I would rather it be at 4:30 to 6:30 because it gives me a little time for school and to get all my stuff done."
- Kayden Brummer (8)



"If there's a late night practice and not all of us are there, we do team bonding and funner stuff than normal practice. It doesn't really affect me because normally, I'm on top of all my stuff."
- Shylah Voytkowski (8)



Confident Yell Chanting toward the bleachers at the JV football game on Jan. 25, seventh grader Haylee Smith gets the crowd into the game. "Cheer seemed like such a fun experience (and) I'm good at yelling," Smith said. "I just go in with confidence." (H. McCrary)