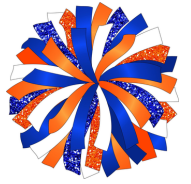
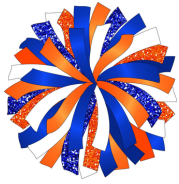


Keep It Up, Keep It Up, Keep That Warrior Spirit Up!



By Kelsie Mattson

It's 2:30 on a Monday afternoon and the West Orange High School Unified Cheer Team is starting their practice. For the next hour and a half, they will be smiling, laughing, and rehearsing for Wednesday games. But this team of students is not your average sports team. This fall it is made up of 10 ESE students and 1 Unified Partner. There are 4 Unified Sports teams this year at WOHS: cheer, flag football, cornhole, and basketball, all made possible by Special Olympics. These teams are elite in their areas, and Unified Cheer performs at JV football games in the fall and competitions in the spring. With every "let's go Warriors, let's go!" you can tell how happy all of the cheerleaders are to be there supporting their fellow Warriors.

As a cheer Unified Partner myself, I have been dreaming of this opportunity for a long time. Last year I was a peer in the Sunridge Middle School Peers as Partners program and absolutely loved it! In my time as a peer, I had formed close friendships with the ESE (or as we called them, VIP) students. Two of the girls had told me about them wanting to do cheer at WOHS, and I could tell how passionate they were. This inspired me to want to do Unified Cheer with some of my best friends Hailey and Sydney. So far it has been a very rewarding experience and I have had so much fun! I love being on the sidelines with these 10 other amazing people!

The athletes on the unified cheer team enjoy this opportunity so much! Freshman Hailey Zaver says that doing cheer with her friends is "fun, funny, and exciting." Some athletes on the team graduated from West Orange last year, but loved it so much that they chose to come back for another season thanks to ESE Transition School.

The bonds created between ESE and Gen Ed. students through programs like Unified Sports are unmatched. I can personally confirm how much they mean to me, they are some of my best friends. Especially through the power of sport and when doing a shared interest, lifelong friendships form between teammates.



Cheerleaders Sydney, Kelsie, and Jena excited about having gotten their uniforms on August 26th!



The team before their first game at Wekiva High School.

