

Cheerleaders preparations for Florida trip interrupted by loss of training facilities

Among the young people at the cheerleading rehearsals at Liberton High School there could be some future Olympians, as the sport has been recognised by the International Olympic Committee.

Diamond Cheerleaders currently hold their practice sessions in the gym hall where there is a lot of excitement in the air – as well as some of the young athletes. In addition to Olympic status for their sport this group has just been successful in a bid to compete in Florida in April next year at the end of season Summit. The cheerleaders are hoping to travel to the States for training and to see the “Worlds” – as long as they can raise enough money to get them there.

But The City of Edinburgh Council who manage the let of the premises at Liberton High School has just advised that the group has to leave and find somewhere else to train.



Diamonds Cheerleaders are off to Florida in 2023 as they have won a bid to compete at the Summit PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Gill Samuel who runs the group with daughter Natalie said: "Diamonds Cheerleaders have just won a bid for Summit in Orlando, Florida next April. We are taking a troupe of 19 athletes ranging from 11 to 16 years-old.

"It takes place in the ESPN Wide World of Sports and we will take the girls to see the World Cheerleading Championships which are also held there.

"The Summit is for the lower level teams who normally don't get the chance or the experience of going to Florida. These girls all idolise certain teams and certain cheerleaders, and they are ecstatic that they are getting the opportunity to go and see them.

"Cheerleading has just been given Olympic sport status. The International Cheerleading Union have been working really hard to get this as a sport and we are delighted it is being

recognised.”

But Gill also told us that the group has been dealt a blow this week with the council’s Active Schools ending their let of the gym at Liberton High School. Gill said: “We are a Community Interest Corporation and have had this let at Liberton High School since April 2021 at the end of the pandemic.

“This group was established with the help and support of our sponsor Black Diamonds to offer affordable cheerleading classes to the local community and to help young children get fit and active, learn the sport of cheerleading and improve their mental health after such a trying time.

“We teach students from 3yrs+ and since April 2021 have built the club up to having almost 170 students. We now find ourselves with nowhere suitable to train as for reasons we are still unclear about, have been told that the let has been given to a dance school. Cheerleading is an extremely inclusive sport. It does not matter what shape, size, gender, ability or physical or mental ability you have. It is a sport for everyone and cannot believe that we may have to close.”

A Council spokesperson said: “We met with Diamond Cheerleaders on Tuesday afternoon to discuss the issues over their let application for Liberton High School and will be looking into the issues raised.”

Depute Lord Provost, Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron said: “As you can see there is a big buzz of energy around this club. With their opportunity to go to Florida to perform there is a big fundraising campaign ahead for them. I am absolutely thrilled to bits for them. Also after Covid this kind of energy is just so good for young girls and women for their physical and mental health and nutrition as well. For the routines they do they need energy and strength. I support them wholeheartedly because I want to see them flying the flag for cheerleading

and this part of Edinburgh. I am thoroughly impressed by their athleticism, stamina and energy.”

When asked about the difficulties the club was facing with their training facilities at Liberton, Cllr Cameron said: “I am still speaking to council officers about this. I have already been dealing with the difficulties they were having about renewing their let since the beginning of June. I had written to the council and Edinburgh Leisure pointing out that the cheerleaders had won the bid and asking about the let. On 2 June I wrote to senior council officers asking for an urgent meeting about this to convey my concerns about the decision on the let application which had been made in March 2022.

“Specifically I am unclear as to what assessment and governance processes have been followed and the criteria applied to date by council officers. As yet I have not had a response from the council officers, and the clock is ticking. I am aware that the club has been offered alternatives however.

“I attended a useful meeting on Tuesday when I asked officers for more clarity on the matter which does not seem to be finally decided as yet. This is a club which should be celebrating and now they seem to be displaced from their familiar space. There is a purpose built dance studio at Liberton High School which would seem more suitable for the dance group. Officers must look at the options so that every group get the opportunity to be healthy and active.”

Edinburgh Southern MSP, Daniel Johnson said: “Black Diamonds have quickly established a thriving programme at Liberton, so being denied the access to facilities at the High School they have been enjoying over the last year seems very unfair. The reasons and decision making behind this are very unclear. I would urge the council and Edinburgh Leisure to come up with a solution that works for the cheer leading squad and the other groups to ensure the fullest variety of activities are made

possible by the excellent facilities at Liberton High School.”



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There is much more to cheerleading than twirling pom poms, with high energy tumbling passes and acrobatics meaning the girls have to keep fit and of course limber up ahead of any sessions – as well as applying full make up and ensuring their hair is styled appropriately.

The ESPN Wide World of Sports where the Summit Cheer Championship will be held next year is in itself something to see with 15,000 spectator seats around a stadium, a track and field complex, restaurants and dedicated playing spaces for baseball. It is part of the Disney Magic Kingdom

Having bid to go to Summit the club – which is a small one – now has to find the money to pay for the trip including travel and accommodation, new kit and outfits, as well as training when they get to the United States.

It is going to cost a lot of money and for some members it will be difficult to afford it, and so they are already looking for sponsors, and have been doing all sorts of fundraising things such as bag packing sessions at local supermarkets.

As you can see from the video at the foot of our article the experience for the young cheerleaders from Edinburgh would be quite out of this world.

Natalie Samuel who is the team coach said: "It is so exciting. We will take time over the summer to plan our coaching for the next season, but it is not only teaching them fitness and cheerleading as a sport, it is also about teaching them life lessons. They come along to cheer and they have to be punctual. It is teamwork it is not only teaching them a sport that we love it is also teaching them things that will be useful in life in the future.

Natalie has been a cheerleader since the age of 13. She said: "I wish I had started earlier but I began as a baton twirler back then. I was in the 2011 Scotland squad when I was quite new to the sport. I also went to Florida in 2015 and had the pleasure of going with my mum Gill who was coaching at the time. After that I also went to Florida in 2019 and it was great to see these girls who I have watched grow up as I coach them get the experience with me. I am just so excited about this opportunity."