



Spring Planning

Bob Buckner, Western Carolina University

"People always call it luck when you've acted more sensibly than they have."

Anne Taylor's quote adequately describes the attitude of many of us when it comes to the preparation and planning of our fall program. It is difficult to even think about the fall marching season while overwhelmed during our concert bands, jazz bands, solo and ensemble months. There are, however, a number of ways to get a major head start on the fall season without imposing on the other functions of your band program.

A major off-season opportunity that presents itself is the repair and preparation of the marching band's rehearsal area and equipment. Spring, in most regions of the country, is a great time to reseed those worn out locations on the practice field. Repairing observation decks and towers, drum major podiums, pit trailers, and any rolling stock should be a priority. Organizing storage areas and repairing PA and other electronic equipment can also be attended to. Keep in mind that this work does not need to be added to your "to-do" list. Delegating such responsibilities to parents and boosters who are knowledgeable in these areas is a must.

This time of year is also a great time to "debrief" your marching staff about the things that worked and didn't work during the past season. A few minutes defining breakdowns in technique such as direction changes, starts and stops, and body orientation can pay huge dividends when the process picks up again.

As the music program and the new season take shape, spring is a very good time to analyze tempo demands and any choreography that may need to be incorporated. Along with staff members and possibly dance professionals available locally, begin to determine exercises and movements that will help your students both physically and musically during the new season.

In addition, increasing tempos, integration of more choreography, and the physical demands of carrying large (and small) instruments for extended periods of time, has brought the role of physical fitness to the forefront and become a priority with many of the more successful groups. Most major drum corps have known for years that the demands of performance and rehearsal require a level of aerobic and muscular fitness that is surprisingly strong. These groups have gone well beyond "push-ups" or errors, brief morning runs, and calisthenics in developing fitness. Several corps now utilize "fitness trainers" to help them throughout their season. In the off season, take the time to analyze the muscular demands of certain instruments and work with knowledgeable fitness or physical education staff to help develop an effective program to ensure your students become more fit. Not only will your students' stamina increase, but this is also a great way to avoid injury during the marching season. Encouraging students to begin walking as exercise is another simple way to bring them to a higher level of fitness before the season begins.



The key to improved performance and maximum learning is to identify both the positive and negative ingredients that affect the success of your activity. Many areas of weakness can be illuminated and worked on ahead of time in order to build a solid performance when the season is in full swing. The opportunity also exists to improve consistency through the development of fundamentals in the pre-season. As Sir Francis Bacon once said, "A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."

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