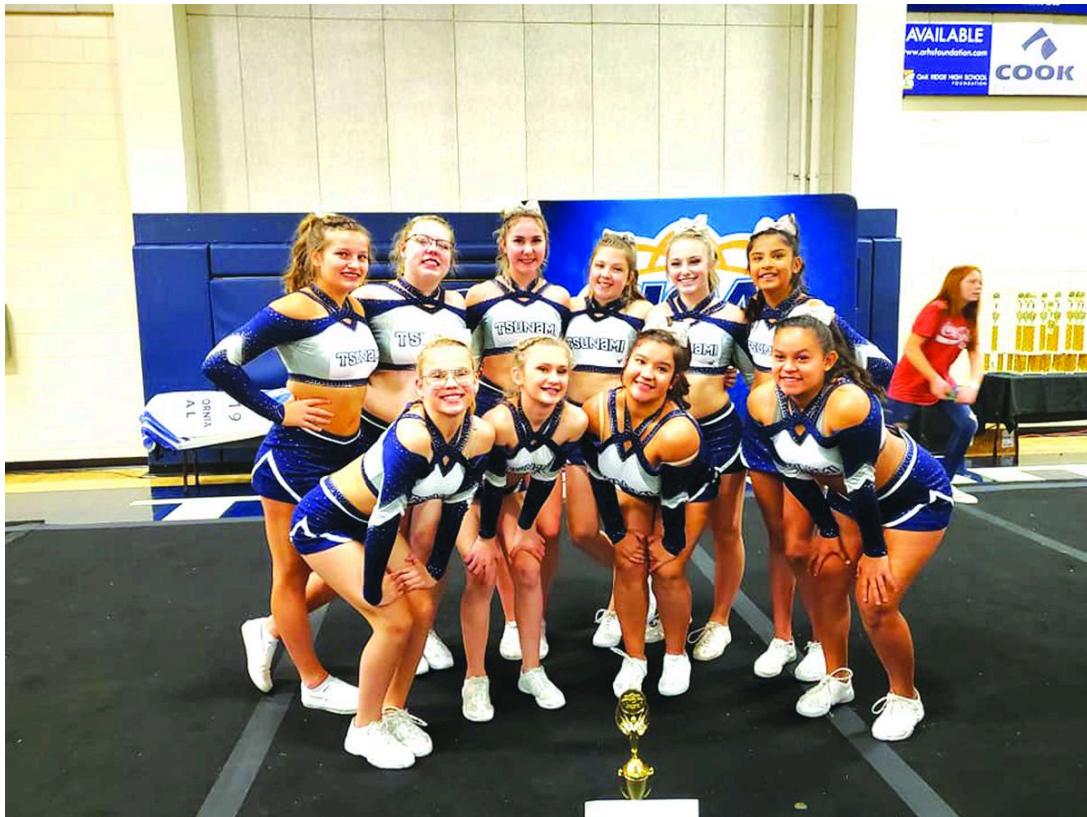


A big arena for the Tsunami All-Starz

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The Tsunami All-Starz cheerleading team - particularly the Senior 3 team - is preparing for upcoming competitions by perfecting stunts, jumps and flips.

The Senior 3 members may be feeling extra nerves and pressure as they prepare for their biggest competition — the D2 Summit. This is the second year in a row the squad has qualified for the contest.

“It’s good for our little community,” said Senior 3 coach Nicole Soule. “[The cheerleaders] want to be better. Some of them really want to be really good.”

Tsunami All-Starz, Crescent City’s competitive cheerleading troupe, is one of many all-star cheerleading teams in the country. Under oversight of the U.S. All-Star Federation, all-star cheer is a co-ed sport competing in complex 2.5-minute routines.

Tsunami All-Starz has been training Crescent City youth cheerleaders for 16 years and consists of three teams: the Tiny, the Junior and the Senior 3 teams.

In a gym on Lake Earl Drive, the cheerleaders dedicate countless hours to practicing tumbling, stunts, dances and pyramids - the classic cheerleader formation. All that effort results in a meticulously choreographed, competitive routine.

Last November, the Senior 3's 2.5-minute routine meant more than just a podium appearance at that competition. It determined whether they would make it to the D2 Summit.

Huddled around a live video on Nov. 18, the Monday following their competition, they waited anxiously for the scores. Happily, their diligent practice had paid off; the team had won a bid to compete in the summit.

The D2 Summit, held in Orlando, Florida at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Walt Disney World, is the three-day-long final event of the cheerleading all-star season for gyms of 125 and fewer. Each day, the teams compete to make it to the next round the following day.

This year's qualification held more pride for the team than the previous years. because their coach and instructor had choreographed it. Previously, Tsunami would contract with a choreographer to teach the routines. This year, to save on costs, coach Soule and instructor Ariel McIntire choreographed it themselves.

Now, Soule says, it is a matter of fundraising. Since all-star cheerleading can be an expensive sport, the team is constantly generating donations to make it affordable for all of the team members to participate.

The D2 Summit is one of their most-expensive competitions. The team needs to raise another \$11,000 by Feb. 27, said Soule – which doesn't include the airfare.

“[We're] fundraising our butts off,” she said. “We're asking for anybody that would like to sponsor them going.”