



## From a Judge's Eye by Joyce E. Pennington



I have had the privilege over the past 35 years to judge many local and state dance/drill team competitions, in addition to Miss Drill Team USA and Miss Drill Team International. Each time I judge, I count myself lucky to have the chance to learn and grow as a dance educator by seeing the incredible talent displayed before me. I have had the chance to see Precision Dance transform into all genres and abilities of true dance and observe the evolution of creativity within our industry.

Judging a competition begins several days in advance with reviewing the criteria on the scoresheet and studying the rules of each individual competition. There is always some variance from event to event and it is important for each adjudicator to educate his or herself on the details of that specific contest. Many times, if I am judging a new event, the event coordinator will send a video for study and review of regionalized dance styles. All of these materials go in my handy brief case to be at my side for the journey to contest and to review again the night before.

On the event day itself, just like many of the performers, I begin a routine of focusing my thoughts on the task ahead. I try to cleanse my mind of any outside thoughts of business or personal life that might interfere with my effectiveness as a judge. Since this day has taken the performers and coaches many weeks and months to prepare, I owe it to them to ensure that I am equally prepared for their performance. I even get butterflies in my stomach before starting to judge, just as the dancers do!

I make sure that I have eaten enough healthy foods to give me energy but not so much that it will tend to slow my thoughts. Certain food groups can tend to make you drowsy on a long day.

Each judge comes 'equipped' with tools of the trade: pens, tally sheet, calculator, judging forms and rules book. I always have water close by as everyone knows that water will cleanse the brain and promote a clear thought process. I pace myself and try not to get overly anxious early in the day so my stamina will allow me to complete the contest as fresh as when I started. As I clear my calculator after each routine, I also clear my mind to see the next team in the most objective manner. I try to see through to the potential of the team and allow that to be my guide when comparing performance, precision, technique, choreography and presentation. Each judge keeps a tally sheet to ensure that scores are falling in a fair and consistent sequence and to refer back to if there are ties or questions.

When the awards ceremony comes, I am always anxious to see how my scores have compared to the other judges to combine for the results. Even though each judge sees each routine in a different light, each has their own important observations that will allow the team to grow as dancers. If all judges thought and commented exactly the same way, the teams would only be seen through one set of eyes. It is important to respect differences.

Given insight into a judge's day has hopefully opened your eyes to the great task that they have in defining and judging the teams at contest. Their role is of equal importance to directors, choreographers and performers. For fun at your next contest, you be the judge and write comments on selected teams that you observe. Give a score and see how you compare to the judging panel! It will give you greater respect for the challenging role of being a dance/drill team contest judge.

