

# Coaching Tips

from Barbara Laing of Omanu School, Tauranga, New Zealand

I teach part time at Omanu School and first became involved with Jump Jam in 2006. Our JUMP JAM coordinator was travelling by herself to Auckland for our team to compete and I felt she could do with some support. I became hooked! I volunteered to help her the following year and travelled to Wellington this time! Such an awesome experience with such awesome kids.

When Andrea left Omanu the following year none of the full-time staff were prepared to take it on and I couldn't bear the thought the kids missing out so put my hand up. All I knew at that time was that you needed a licence, the kids loved it, they were pretty good at it, and just maybe I could facilitate it. Because I wasn't as fit as the previous coach, I decided to let the kids do all the work and I pretty much just assisted. I got advice from one of the mums who knew more about it than me and away we went to "my" first comp in Christchurch where we were placed second and won the costume award! No turning back now!

As the hype in the teams has increased over the years we have been able to create 3 teams each year. A yr1-4, 4-6 and an All Boys team. As a school we have agreed not to take Juniors if the competition is further South than Taupo, however when that occurs we run with a development squad in preparation for the following year. Because of my role in the school being part time teacher /part time Librarian, I am able to take on all the management/fundraising aspects which frees up our coaches to just coach. I am always available to fill in when they can't make it and mostly assist at the coaching sessions which adds an extra "ideas" person. Possibly because of this it has not been difficult to find teachers prepared to coach a team. We did utilise the expertise of a parent for 3 years and also have had ex-students come back and coach teams while attending Intermediate.

Because of the high-profile Jump Jam has gained in our school, management are looking ahead to ensure that our coaches will have release time when I leave, to ensure they can maintain the management/fundraising commitment.

At Omanu we run auditions, NB previous team members have to audition, early in term 1. We give everyone a go first and after a couple of lunch sessions we eliminate to a "possibles" group. From there we get down to a "probable" group and specifically coach them for around 6 sessions before the final selection. Generally we choose the kids who have good timing and coordination. Over the years I have come to realise that the most important criteria is actually performance skills. It is much easier to teach technique than performance or timing. These kids then also run our fun lunchtime sessions twice a week and help out with any class sessions that are held. All our junior school and middle school have weekly Jump Jam sessions for Fitness and our "Idol and X Factor" members gain extra confidence running the routines for them.

We have run with reserves in the past but found this to be more of a problem than a help. Mainly because they never really feel a part of the team and ultimately all kids want to be on stage and it is a big ask to attend so many practices and never quite make it. Not like in rugby where the reserves do get to play at some stage. It is especially difficult when it is time to change the routine for "Challenge" as the reserve actually has to learn so many different positions.

We tend to hold our practices before school. 8.00 - 8.45am so that they **don't** clash with any other activities the kids are involved in. Usually the team members are the ones that are also in EVERYTHING else! If necessary nearer to the DVD filming and the Competition, we also run holiday sessions, however these are not compulsory, and we do try to find a day and time that suits the majority.

At Omanu we try to keep costs to a minimum so that ALL students are on an equal footing and don't miss out through home circumstances. The school puts forward a favourable budget each year and we always top that up through fundraising. Our last trip to Christchurch was at no cost to any of the team.

Changing the choreography, while lots of fun this aspect can be quite daunting. As much as possible we do give students the opportunity to create changes and suggest new formations. We

have learnt that it is best to make the choreography change occur as the formation changes occur to maximise the time. Students tend to enjoy the routine more when they have ownership.

Song choice is also difficult and possibly the biggest gamble! Some of our coaches have allowed the team to choose the song from a list of possibilities. This works well to ensure their interest. We have changed songs between DVD entry and Challenge. Both times this was definitely to our benefit and ensured a placing. It added a freshness and because the kids were learning a new routine, incorporating changes was reasonably easy.

Costuming for some routines is very easy and quite tricky for others. While it seems a minor aspect, it is actually easy points if done correctly and does have a major impact. It is worth spending time on it. It should be considered as part of the process for choosing the routine.

Performing in front of an audience regularly is possibly some of the best advice given to build confidence. However, this is often much more difficult to organise especially when children have so many other activities going on and teachers are not happy with kids going out during class time any more than they deem necessary. We do try to perform in front of our school at syndicate assemblies and always have a school-wide dress rehearsal. In the past we have also performed at another local school, at an Old Folks Home, and last year at our local Pasifika festival. Performing in front of peers is by far the most difficult and not always a true indication of the team's ability.

Some of the main difficulties we have found with Jump Jam is that because it is a year long commitment for both team members and coaches, maintaining the kids interest is paramount. It has to be fun. We try to combine team building activities into practice sessions. Other activities tend to take precedence especially with new parents who do not actually realise the extremely high standard expected at competition. This ultimately means you often do not have ALL team members at ALL practices. It can be expensive, especially travel and costuming. It is extremely addictive! However, the positives far outweigh the negatives. Parents and teachers notice the difference in the childrens confidence, self-esteem, management skills and general attitude. Often the children themselves comment on the positives. Strangely I think the fitness aspect is secondary!