

Annual Report to the Color Guard Advisory Board

Color Guard Education Coordinator-Steering Committee Chair- Karl Lowe

Steering Committee Meeting – July

The Steering Committee had their first live meeting since before Covid. We started with a review of the job and focus of advocacy away from individual units and to the entirety of the *Activity*. A 14-page report from that meeting was sent to all units for review. I included a 5-page abbreviated report for those that just want the essential items pertaining to shifts in Judging Philosophy and Sheet Changes. This was done in hopes that the information was seen by a wider population of younger instructors and newer units.

Outreach to Local Judges

The office sent out a notice targeting local level judges interested in joining the WGI ranks. This was accompanied by an “application process” that was unified between all 3 divisions. This was not initiated by the Color Guard Division. 13 applicants were reviewed by me with a wide range of experience. Of these, 4 showed a strong potential based solely on the files they submitted and the letters of recommendation that accompanied them. We will reach out again to those 4 and encourage them to apply for the Live Trails that are scheduled for the 2027 Season. It is the Live Trial process that is the pathway to WGI Roster. Any judge can apply and submit the required materials. Application to the Live Trials comes with higher standards for experience, more narrow acceptance of sources for letters of recommendation, and sample files from all classes along with the show recaps from the contests where those files were created.

Some applicants, from the open search, were under the impression that this outreach was a fast-track program for judging the 2026 Season. The Color Guard Division eliminated the fast-track program years ago.

The Live Trial Experience happens at a large Regional where numbers management is tested over multiple rounds of the same class. The trial also has expansive exposure to Open and World Class units. Comparisons are made to the working panel, as a control group, and conversations are had in regard to process and accountability for decisions. Those that show promise are then invited to trial at Championships. Then some, in those final ranks, are accepted into the WGI Roster

for possible assignments in the following year. That year of their first opportunity is also a year that is likely to include a live Judge Meeting. This process is deliberate and does not have any bypass opportunities. Those participants in the 2027 Live Trials will not be available to Roster membership until the 2028 Season.

I am happy to speak to the samples I received and general observations of the types of commentary I heard and the range of experience that was represented by these applicants.

Judges Meeting -January

Like the Steering Committee, this was our first live meeting since before Covid. 63 attended the well-organized and well-executed meeting. Months of planning on the part of the Judge Admin team headed by Curtis led to a wide range of topics presented in a variety of ways. The Philosophical information was a product of the Steering Committee and the Judge advisors to that committee. Judge logistics were also a large part of the meeting as well as an emphasis on professionalism and the partnership with the instructor community in the competitive process. Breakout session in smaller groups allowed for more specific round-table conversations. Subjects for these smaller sessions included: digging deeper, being open to the unexpected, the challenges around AI as an influence on Instructor impression and as a tool to analyze the judges' own work, as well as an overview of "the Season Ahead".

The agenda along with the slide presentations were made available in the Instructor Information HUB.

Sheet Changes

Adjustment of Class Standards in World Class

This adjustment better reflected the reality of a still large percentage of World Class groups being more upper level of *Advanced* than *Virtuosic*. *Standard-Setting* was eliminated as Box 6 was taken away from the criteria reference. I expect us to sit with the change for a couple of years as the numbers in these classes start to grow faster.

World Class Box 5 Expansion and the Elimination of Box 6

This change was prompted by the perception that top scores in the class were too low. The Steering Committee Report explains the options considered and the rationale behind this chosen approach. By 2026, scores had returned to historical ranges. This will stay in place unchanged until

2028. We anticipate the return of Box 6 for that season. This will continue to be part of this year's Steering Committee discussions.

Information HUB

There is so much important information located in this service to instructors. The Hub was expanded containing more types of information beyond the initial pre-season videos. The hub grows each week of the season with items added all the way into Championships. The office did a nice job with weekly reminders of recently added items to watch for. I expect this concept to evolve in the coming year to include more resources and hopefully a bit more ease in finding specific items.

I believe that it is underused by the instructors that need this information the most. It is the proverbial water to the 'drinkless' horse that simply doesn't see the need.

Regional+ Events

The events were a big swing of the bat for WGI. I feel in large part they were a big success. As with all new things, reflection will bring adjustments and progress as strengths and vulnerabilities reveal themselves.

Critiques

This was a huge asset to instructors and a great service to all units that attended. It presented some scheduling issues but the split contests in SA at prelims was an essential risk taken to facilitate all units getting a critique. I feel like the service offered outweighed any confusion.

The way Curtis scheduled, allowed for Championship judges to be assigned, in Prelims, to the class they were likely to judge in Dayton. This ensured that the judge was also able to see units and hear from those instructors that they were likely to see at Championships.

Double Panels

Though this is seen as an asset to the units, this came at a cost to judges in terms of logistics and travel issues. Dale will speak more to this in Las Vegas. See his report for a lead-in to this conversation.

Overviews

A typical season has 3-5 Overviews at various Regionals. This year, with the Regional+ Events, we had 17 overviews. We sent invitations to all that had

done Overviews in the past along with a couple of select others. Each sent in availabilities, calls were made, and personnel was assigned.

Many also offered video feedback after their experience that proved to be hugely helpful and insightful. I thought this series of videos proved to be some of the most educational observations that would apply to all. Thanks to All that participated in the follow-up!

This too, came at a great logistical price. It is important to remember that as panels switched throughout the day, Overview personnel did not. Double panels allowed for the show to be continuous without any breaks beyond those small breaks between classes. This meant that in order to provide the overview service to all participants, the overviewer had to be in the stands from the start of the show to the end. World guards were the only class 'guaranteed' a spot in Finals. Because of this, the overviewer could take that class off and then see them in Finals. The RA finals were held before the World Prelims thereby allowing a bit of a break for anyone that was trying to do all the overviews in Prelims. (Most did this.) The future expectations will need to be adjusted and, unless 2 overviews service each Regional, a percentage of As and Opens may have to miss out on this service. Smaller, 1-day Regionals had more ease for the Overview. This will need to be ironed out as we plan for 2027. I saw no greater love for the activity than the Overview Instructors eating meals in the stands and wiggling in their seats as they hoped for a 10-minute break between classes. I owe you all a million thanks!

Pre-Covid Pattern for Meetings and Sheet Changes

We are working to bring back the pattern of alternating emphasis of tasks to every other year (biennial). Sheet Changes and larger philosophical shifts would happen on years that also had a live Steering Committee meeting and a live Judge Summit. For now, those are even-numbered years/seasons. The alternative years (odd-numbered) would be used to prepare for those eventual changes, consider adjustments to sheet format to be workshopped and developed over time, and perhaps create more instructor service items. These "other" years would also be the years for the Live Trials for potential Judges to "audition" for the WGI Roster. This would allow this process to take on a greater focus of energies in those specific years, as opposed to being shoehorned in the pockets of very limited spare time when considering the annual approach from the past. This will diminish the feel of sheet changes and philosophical shifts as moving targets and hopefully eliminate any possible decisions being made as reactions to competitive results or individual

unit concerns. This allows us to live with changes to truly see value and vulnerability over the test of time and multiple seasons. Of course, any item that is proven to fail would be adjusted as needed in any year necessary. We will not force ourselves to live in our own failure for the sake of a well-intended policy.

Considering this Meeting...

This can be boring....

This is a very important meeting where lasting decisions are made that carry an impact over years. It is not always interesting and certainly not always entertaining. It is common to value the meeting in terms of how much we each engage or the variety of experiences over time. Be reminded that a big portion of this is business. Your informed opinion is important. Listen beyond the dynamics of the presenter to the essence of the message. Ask the questions you need to do the job in a way that represents the quality you have shown on the floor.

Chief Judge Elections ...Make sure your vote is an informed vote!

When it comes to the Chief Judge elections this year, it is important that, if you are not familiar with the candidates and have no connection to the process, you reach out to one of your staff persons that is. If you are left without that resource, you will have resumes and a job description available on-site. Also, each candidate will be available for conversations during breaks and throughout the day on both Friday and Saturday. They will be available after they do their presentations on Saturday morning, up until the actual vote on Saturday night. This is meant to give you the opportunity to meet them and ask them questions. Some of you will ask advice from a trusted Instructor, not necessarily connected to your group. Ask for their thoughts, but be sure to maintain your intellectual autonomy to help filter through what may be campaigning.

Steering Committee Members as Quick Help!

So many of you will be new to this experience, especially the A and Open representatives. The Steering Committee Instructors are your advocate and ally in these meetings. Anything you are not sure of, they can help!

We typically have a session where the SC Instructors survey concerns and discuss their findings along with some items that are expected to be issues for the coming year. With the Chief Judge election and a large number of

proposals, we are expecting the data mining session to be diminished. Our safety net for this is the “Happy Hour” that the SC hosts after the meeting. We typically all take a break to grab a beverage then meet back in the space for round-table conversations. IF you have thoughts for them, please make sure you stick around and share in this conversation. There will also be notepads and pens around the room so that at ANY time during the weekend you can write your thoughts down and pass your thoughts over to any one of them for consideration during our August meeting.

Most of the A and Open reps will be representing groups that will be promoted into the next class of competition. These Steering Committee members are a great resource for making that transition. Grab them at some point, buy them a beverage, and bend their ears about your hopes, fears, and expectations for the new experience. They can reflect for you and perhaps inform your strategy towards greater success. You don’t have to go-it-alone. These Instructors have marked success in every class and can help you take those first critical steps in planning for this new challenge. This is an opportunity that exists only at this meeting, and they have each assured me that they are willing. Take advantage of this time between seasons to have a clear-headed, agenda-free reflection on your challenge ahead.

I’m looking forward to seeing you all and meeting some new faces. Please take the time to introduce yourself if we haven’t met already.

Thank you Steering Committee for your work this year, especially the time we had in Dallas. It was a huge relief from the Zoom-world we have been living in. You are so much more than talking heads.

Thank you Dale for your leadership. Your archival knowledge has shed light to so much context.

Thank you Curtis for your amazing guidance, friendship, and service. You are already missed!

‘See Y’all Soon!

-Karl