

A GUIDE TO THE SPORT OF MARCHING

The Sport of Marching has often been referred to as the “best kept secret” by many a spectator viewing the sport for the first time. Marching as a competitive or recreational sport has much to offer all participants not the least of which is correct deportment, self-discipline, friendship and fun. It is sad to note that the number of marching teams in each State has been on a decline since the early '80's and the survival of the sport now depends upon promoting greater public and corporate awareness.

With increased competition from many new sports, the AMA Board of Management went through a strategic planning process with the aim of developing greater and more flexible participation in the sport of marching for players, officials and supporters. In the 1999-2000 season, major changes were introduced to make the sport more user-friendly.

In the 2007-2008 season more opportunities were made available to teams with the introduction of a Set Drill Routine for Intermediates and Seniors. The Precision Drill for Juniors was renamed Set Drill.

Here is a guideline to assist the new or past marcher/spectator to follow the basic rules of the Sport today.

There are three competitive Sections –

Junior (Under 12) Intermediate (Under 17) and Senior. There are two non-competitive Sections – Under 9 and Masters (mature marchers), although a challenge is made available to Masters Teams at the Australian Championships.

There are three Disciplines the Junior Section –

Junior – March Past, Precision Drill & Artistic Freestyle

There are five Disciplines for Intermediates and Seniors –

Set Drill, Precision Drill, Exhibition March, Prop Precision (new 2002/2003) and Artistic Freestyle.

The minimum size of a competitive team has been reduced to six with the maximum number being twenty for all phases except Junior March Past (twelve) and Set Drill with a maximum of nine.

The competition area has been reduced from 45metres x 30metres to less than one quarter the size of 20metres x 15metres. The reduction in size allows for competitions to be held indoors as well as performances to Showcase the Sport. Increased public performances are now possible with the requirements for area having been reduced to such an extent.

The March Past for Junior marchers is a very basic set routine of standard drills which act as an introduction to “marching”.

The Set Drill is the equivalent of the Set March or March Plan however there is no Leader, no whistle signals, no Circle for the Finish, one disc at Start for the Intermediate and Senior teams, with extra discs for Juniors at the start of selected movements. The routine finishes with all team members halting and saluting together.

The Precision Drill Routine originally replaced the Set March or March Plan as it was known in earlier days. There is no Leader, no whistle signals, no Circle for the Finish, one Disc at Start. The routine finishes with all members halting and saluting together – anywhere in the area preferably close to the centre/front. The Intermediate and Senior routines have five and six Compulsory Drill Movements respectively, which the Coach choreographs in any sequence, and in most cases in any direction and in any formation. The Compulsory Drill Movements are linked with free-choice marching drills and movements. All teams start from the same position in a squad formation.

The Exhibition March for Senior and Intermediate teams is a thematic non-prop marching routine with allowable rhythmic (non-dance) movements to enhance the performance. The costume should be appropriate to the type of routine being performed. Precision in timing and movement with variety of formations are an important part of this routine – there are no compulsories.

Prop Precision is a new routine, introduced in the 2002/2003 season, for seniors only following the International Drill Dance Championships in Adelaide, July 2001. The idea of expanding the Senior repertoire was given due consideration in order to create opportunities for participation in International competitions and to develop a greater awareness in the disciplines of the Australian Marching Association by inviting other groups to participate in open competitions. In 2007-2008 the routine was made available to the Intermediate section.

The Artistic Freestyle (Drill-Dance) has developed from the Own Choice Display of the early '80's. Precision Drill Teams are given the opportunity to perform a free-choice interpretation of a story/them/dance/pantomime within the specified rules. Movement must correlate to the music and should demonstrate variety, versatility, some complexity of movement with sureness of performance and have visual value. The costumes should be in character and enhance the performance. Scene-setting props are now permitted to add atmosphere.

Technical Drill was initially introduced for the Masters Section in 2004 in order to promote and International Competition with New Zealand.

Display of Marching (for Masters) was introduced in 2004 as the details required very little change to the New Zealand Display rules.

Revised Judging System

As part of the process of developing greater and more flexible participation in the Sport of Marching, the AMA Judging System has undergone a process of critique and revision. The Revised Judging System was implemented at the start of the 1999-2000 season.

Annually, the system and the scoresheets, known as “Appreciation Sheets”, are reviewed and amended to comply with the requirements of the current season and to maintain a high standard of judging. The role of the Judge is to appreciate the work of the team and the coach(s) and to give credit where credit is due, thus the sheets have been renamed “appreciation sheets”.

The categories on the appreciation sheet now match criteria for “performance arts” in the syllabi of State Education Departments – allowing for marketing opportunities – in addition to eliminating ambiguities.

Performance (execution – the HOW) and Choreography (routine construction – the WHAT) are separately rated with the Judges rating to “descriptive standards” not numerical values. In the Recording Room, Judges’ ratings are translated into scores as prescribed on a transparent overlay, with every value matching a “definable” standard.

The revised AMA Judging System is one of Rating, not Ranking.

There are only three types of judgments on the current appreciation sheets –

Quantity, Degree of Correctness and Frequency.

The Judge assesses

“how much ?”, “to what degree was the drill correct ?”, and “how often ?”

All judgments are OBSERVABLE

The Judging Panel for Junior March Past consists of five Performance Judges whilst the Panels for Precision Drill, Exhibition March, Prop Precision and Artistic Freestyle are made up of four Performance Judges and three Formation/Choreography Judges. Performance Judges are centrally positioned approximately seven metres to the front of the front boundary. Formation//Choreography Judges are centrally seated in an appropriate elevated position behind the Performance Judges. At the 2005 Federal Technical Conference, Infringement Judges were introduced for Junior March Past and all sections of Precision Drill to allow the Compulsory and Formation Judges to concentrate on their special tasks. Set Drill also has an Infringement Judge.

Determining the Winners (on the Master Sheet)

Seven Judges adjudicating:

- A. Four Performance Judges
- B. Three Routine Construction/Choreography Judges

1. Eliminate the highest and lowest SCORES from A – leaves 2 SCORES
2. Eliminate the highest and lowest SCORES from B – leaves 1 SCORE
3. Add the three remaining SCORES = TOTAL SCORE
4. HIGHEST TEAM SCORE IS BEST

Five Performance Judges adjudicating

1. Eliminate highest and lowest SCORES – leaves 3 SCORES
2. HIGHEST TEAM SCORE IS BEST

Each Discipline is a Championship in its own right – there is no overall Championship or Aggregate award. Teams are encouraged to participate at their own level without the pressure of competing in every Discipline until they are ready or even wish to do so.

As with many similar sports, Marching has had to move with the times and to modernise in order to create a more appealing image. The important thing is that the basics remain the same and still offer the participant - good deportment, poise, mental stimulation and lasting friendships to name a few.

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