



Marching Competitions – A Guide for Parents

The Blue Valley West Marching Band, the **Red & Silver Brigade**, regularly participates in marching festivals and competitions. In its brief 20-year history, the Red & Silver Brigade has achieved considerable competitive success at the State and Regional level, contributing to Excellence and Pride we celebrate a part of the Blue Valley West Community!

As we enter the competitive phase of our marching season, there are often many questions about what a marching festival is and how they work, especially from our newest parents and students. Hopefully the information below will help you better understand the importance of these events to our students and program.

Why do we compete? There are several reasons.

- To receive constructive feedback that helps us grow as musicians, performers, and teachers.
- Competition promotes innovation and creativity which in turn enriches our students' band experience.
- Seeing other performances inspires students to reach for higher levels of technical and musical excellence.
- Students can showcase their hard work for a knowledgeable and highly appreciative audience.
- When approached in a healthy way competition should be fun!

What is a marching competition? Marching bands typically have up to 15 minutes of time to set-up, perform, and exit the field. A panel of judges critiques and scores each performance.

Who sponsors marching competitions? Why do they all have different names? Is one more important than the other? The competitions we attend are sponsored by universities, high schools, and sometimes professional music education associations. They often have *Festival, Invitational, Championship, or Review* in the name. In many other parts of the country bands compete on a circuit with the same judges each week to see growth. In Kansas and Missouri competitions are not organized in that way, but they do use scoresheets and formats utilized by several national organizations.

Bands of America (BOA) is the largest music organization in the country and sponsors Regional Competitions and the Grand Nationals in Indianapolis each November. The Red & Silver Brigade has competed in these events in the past. **US Bands** also sponsors Regional and National level events. The competitions we attend this year use judging criteria and formats followed by BOA and US Bands.

What is a "class"? How are the bands grouped? It differs for each competition. Bands may be grouped into classifications according to the total number of performers; number of woodwind / brass performers only; or the size of the school. Bands are grouped by class so that bands compete with similar sized groups or groups with similar resources.

What are Prelims and Finals? Most competitions we attend have a **Preliminary** or qualifying round, and bands typically compete within their class. The overall highest scores then advance to the **Finals** round where bands compete against each other regardless of class.

How are the bands scored? Each judge has a certain number of points, to award in their caption. Each score is then multiplied by a percentage to arrive at an overall score. Every festival uses a different rubric or scoring criteria, so it is not possible to compare scores from one event to the other.

What are the different captions? What are the judges looking for? This is the question that parents ask the most. While judges use a rubric to guide their scoring, it is still a somewhat subjective process. The common captions include:

Effect: The overall impact of the show. This is often the highest weighted category. Effect judges consider the design, complexity, and artistic elements of the show and how well those elements are performed. Sometimes there are sub-captions for **Music Effect** and **General Effect**.

Visual: Visual judges evaluate the individual and group performance of marching techniques and choreography. Visual judges look for consistency of execution as well as perceived difficulty of the marching show.

Music: Music judges evaluate the individual and group performance of musical techniques. Music judges also critique and score the musical impact of the band's performance.

Color Guard / Percussion: Color Guard and Percussion are often judged independently as well given the unique skill sets of their areas. While these scores do not typically count in the overall score, there are often separate awards in these areas.

What are the requirements of the bands? This is often what is both exciting and confusing about a marching competition. There are no requirements on what the bands are to perform. Every program makes creative decisions about the type of music and visual package they want to use that will both entertain audiences as well as provide opportunities for artistic and competitive success. Sometimes a show will be very popular with the audience, but unfortunately lacking in critical elements that the judges consider. Enjoy the range of performance possibilities!

What are the rankings? Who wins? Usually the top three scoring bands in each class are recognized in Prelims. In Finals usually all the scores are announced with an overall champion determined by the highest score. At both levels there are often caption awards given for the highest score in Effect, Visual, and Musical performance.

How do you "act" at a marching festival? How can we help? Attending a festival is like attending a jazz concert or a play. You should be quiet during the performance, however, it is certainly appropriate to clap and cheer for exciting or well-performed moments in any show. It is not appropriate to walk in or out of the performance area while a band is performing. Volunteer to chaperone or schlep! Serve food or hand out uniforms! Unlike many other activities your student may do, marching band is something you can experience from a very close vantage point!

But Seriously...did you see some of those props / costumes / effects?!? Yes. For those that maybe marched when you were younger, the marching arts have gone far beyond the football field and simple music and movement. Some groups will spend a very large amount of money to design very elaborate props, backdrops, and costumes. These things go a long way towards generating overall effect. When used well, these extra elements can boost scores very high. That said, the highest scoring bands will always be those that march and play at the highest level!

Final Thoughts: While marching festivals are competitive events, it is important to acknowledge the effort of every band. Every group that performs spent countless hours rehearsing and preparing their shows. While some groups may give stronger performances than others, every group is making an effort to improve simply by attending a marching competition.

As I tell the students each year, all we can control is how well we perform; and our goal at each and every event is to perform better than we did at the last. Each year we seek out new challenges for our students, and we work to meet those challenges. Trophies and awards are nice, but in the end, we evaluate our success based on our musical growth throughout the season. The journey is what should matter most, not the destination. My favorite quote is presented each year during the Finals ceremony at Blue Springs.

"There are many group and personal victories in every band that we may never know about publicly. Marching arts are a place where EVERY student has an opportunity to contribute to the success of the whole."

We hope you enjoy our upcoming performances and greatly appreciate your support of your students!