

Dance Chance

132 competitors danced
for a panel of judges in the hopes
of being one of 15
members of the Sacramento Kings
Dance Team

BY KIMBERLY HORG

Kings fans gather eagerly at every game for the experience and live entertainment that only ARCO Arena can offer.

In front of 17,317 excited fans, the Sacramento Kings Dance Team adds to the visual experience of the game. The dancers feed off the Kings Sixth Man's loud roars, pumped fists and applause, and respond with some of the hottest moves on the court.

But getting a spot on the dance team's roster isn't easy. Just like the five players on the court represent thousands of ballers who'd like to fill their shoes, the women performing on the court come from a long line of competitors as well.

In July, more than 100 contestants came to ARCO Arena from all over the world—literally—for the chance to become a Kings dancer.

Some of the contestants got tips before the audition at a prep class a couple weeks before the event, but others went

out on a limb and gave it a shot with no formal instructions.

The only requirements were that all candidates must be at least 19 years old, wear a two-piece uniform with nude tights, non-marking soled shoes, complete an application and have two current photos.

The 132 competitors danced in a series of three-person performances while a panel of judges made up of leaders from the dance and entertainment industry as well as staff from Maloof Sports & Entertainment narrowed it down to 44 finalists. After the numbers of the first cut were announced, the remaining finalists learned a partial dance routine. Out of those 44 contestants, 24 were picked for the final audition the next day and then 16 skilled dancers made the grade.

"The final competition consisted of an interview and a final dance audition where they performed four eight counts

of their own choreography," said Dance Team Manager, Leslie Bow. "The judges were looking for outgoing, professional, well spoken, athletic, individuals with dance experience."

Finalists also were required to go through a panel interview before performing their final dance routine. The judges placed an equal emphasis on dance ability, presentation and fan friendliness. In the end, nine girls who tried out from last year's team and six newcomers made the grade.

Three of the dancers have been members of the team for at least three years. This is the sixth—nonconsecutive—year of dancing with the Kings for Heidi of Sacramento, the fifth season for Jennifer from Citrus Heights, the fourth year for Krystal of Stockton, the third season for Jamie of Turlock and Kristin of Sacramento is another third year member.

Camille of Rancho Cordova, Sarah of Carmichael, Summer of Modesto,

Candace of Rocklin and Jeannie of Roseville are all in their second year with the team.

The dancers that will be performing at ARCO Arena for the first time are Rachel from Roseville, Folsom resident, Carly, Citrus Heights resident, Megan, Cami of Millville, Rebecca of Orangevale and a new Sacramento resident, Cicely.

Cicely auditioned with only a couple hours of sleep. After arriving at the Sacramento airport early in the morning on the day of the audition, she gathered her belongings, made her way to her new home and then got ready for the auditions. After making the first cut she was already exhausted. But the next level of the competition was not over until 9 p.m. so she mustered up all her energy and gave it her best.

The next day was easier for her because the final audition didn't start until 5 p.m. and it only lasted a couple hours. An hour after the final audition, the finalists were told to call a number to see if they made it.

"I was very excited when I found out I made the team!" she said. "I love performing."

Cicely is from Delaware and was a cheerleader for the Philadelphia Eagles in 2002. According to the new Kings dancer, she was picked out of 500 girls who auditioned for the Eagles so she is no stranger to competition.

Her move date was originally in August but she decided to move a month earlier in order to make the audition. And although the day of the audition was chaotic, she says it was worth it in the end and hopes making the team will also help her career.

"I moved here because I want to pursue a modeling and acting career," she said.

The Sacramento Kings Dance Team has made hundreds of worldwide appearances, including the opportunity to perform at the 1999 NBA Japan Games in Tokyo, the Kings preseason games in Albuquerque, Reno and Las Vegas as well as appearances on the



NBA Inside Stuff and ESPN where they were promoting their very own "I LOVE THIS GAME" NBA commercial.

The dancers not only perform on the court, their time off the court is divided by signing autographs, taking photos and helping out with community service events for various Maloof Sports & Entertainment community partners.

Some of the dancers have received the title of Miss Sacramento, Miss Stockton, Miss Dance Utah, were winners of several National Dance Competitions, Music Circus Productions, NFL Dance Teams, danced in Superbowl and have been on commercials as well as MTV videos.

After Fresno native, Justine Smith's recent appearances in music videos (for Missy Elliot and Juvenile), the experience received while on the Central Valley Coyotes dance team and the Fresno Heat Wave, she thought she was ready to take it to the next level but the competition was still too fierce.

"This was my first time trying out and you have to start somewhere," Smith said. "I'll be back next year and now I have a better idea of what to do."

It was Sacramento resident and recent graduate, Diona Brown, first time auditioning as well and she wasn't expecting so many people to try out. Brown was a cheerleader when she attended Cal Poly and says it is very competitive to make it on any dance or cheerleading team.

San Francisco resident, Heather Young, also auditioned for the team for the first time and was just happy to make the first cut.

"I am happy to get this far considering how competitive it is," she said.

Bay Area resident, Latisha Taylor, said that considering the number of girls auditioning and taking into account the number of returning girls who auditioned, it was really hard to make the team. Latisha added that she is disappointed she didn't make it but will try out again and again until she does.

Whether it is the passion for dancing or the excitement of being in front of a crowd, becoming a member of the



team is a dream for many. Dancers travel as far away as New Orleans, South Dakota and even Japan to audition.

One contestant traveled across the world, two times over, to audition for the team. Naoko Kawanaka lives in Japan and made the long journey from home for the past two years to try to make her dream come true.

"I am a fan of the Kings and it is my dream to be a dancer," she said after making it to the finals.

Some of the other contestants simply wanted to try out, just for the fun of it.

Sacramento resident and American River College student, Tina Martin tried out for the team a couple years ago and didn't make it this time or last but says she wanted to try again because it is fun.

Dancing for a Kings game appears to be "all fun and games" but there is also a lot of hard work and skill involved. Every member of the team has more than a decade of dance experience.

The dance material the team performs at games is learned at camp and different people are hired to teach them.

"They will begin rehearsals in August for games to begin in October," Bow said. "We will rotate 12 dancers per game at which, on average, they will perform two routines and then a few fourth quarter free styling segments." ♦

