

# A-D-M-I- R-A-L-S!

## The cat-eat-cat world of cheerleading.

By Nanci Tangeman

It's early on Sunday morning and 122 women are packed into the Beijneshal in Haarlem. They're here to do one thing: relinquish their right to date an Amsterdam Admirals football player.

Okay, they're here for more than that. They're also here to show off their perfectly flat bellies. And prove they know their *links* from their *rechts*. Oh—and they're also here to scratch their way through to the next round of tryouts for the Amsterdam Admirals cheerleaders.

### ARE YOU READY? GO!

'There is no typical Admirals cheerleader,' explains Perry Hendricks. He handles PR for the Admirals and seems to love his job this morning. He's busy with photographers, journalists and a roomful of beautiful women.

'It's tough,' he complains, leaning around the room. 'Every year the same.'

'Our cheerleaders are from all ethnic backgrounds and social agendas. They are in school, lawyers, et cetera.' That's the last politically correct thing he'll say all day.

With large paper numbers pinned to their skimpy tops, the girls spread out around the hall, organised with 1 through 10 in the front row, and 110 through 122 at the rear. The girls—never 'women', even though the oldest is 30—begin their warm-up routine, led by perky Elfie, a former Admirals cheerleader. (The cheerleaders

lose their last names when they join the team—partially for security reasons.)

Numbers 1 through 122 smile and bend over in unison. They'll spend a few hours learning a dance routine and then perform for four judges. Sixty girls will survive today's cut.

'They're all really friendly now, but wait until the auditions begin,' says Hendriks. 'That's when the real cat fight begins.'

Halfway through the warm-up comes the first moment of truth, that equalizer of all things cheerleader: the splits. Legs part and the group glides to the floor. A few less agile girls stop halfway down, their faces fearful and visible above the crowd.

### READY? OKAY! LET'S GO

It's time to learn the routine. This is not just a simple cheer that spells out the team's name, but a full-fledged dance routine that could change their lives, catapult them to bigger and better things.

As it did for Sharon, of the girl group Raffish, who started her career with the Admirals; and Roxanne, who dances in the dinner show at the Efteling; and Dagmar Saija, the newest Miss Earth Netherlands. (Unfortunately, Saija could not make the auditions this year because of a pageant trip and will have to give up her spot on the squad. But at least she got her last name back).

But to get the big breaks, the girls have to learn today's routine. And to teach them, they've called in a specialist.

Canadian Ashley Orman was a collegiate cheerleader at Georgia Tech and a professional cheerleader in the NFL with the San Diego Chargers. She is considered the 'pioneer of cheerleading in Europe.' She is also the coach of the Admirals cheerleaders.

In fluent cheerleaderese, Orman breaks down every movement of the routine into a precise *acht*-count: *een* and

*twee*; *drie* and *vier*; *vijf*, *zes*, *seven*, *acht*.

Some girls sparkle; some fizzle. Finally, there's time for a break. A few sneak outside for a forbidden cigarette (cheerleaders are not allowed to smoke or drink alcohol when they are in uniform) and others rest and chat about why they're here.

Stephanie (#40), a 19-year-old call centre agent from Wijk bij Duurstede, is a returning cheerleader. 'I know nothing about American football. But the dancers get to do so much more than a normal dance group. We danced at a René Froger concert and at a children's program at Ahoy and we appear on game shows!'

Iris (#19) is a dancer on the Utrecht Dominators team. 'I just want to be part of the hottest dance team in Europe,' she says. The first year she tried out she made the Admirals team. For the past three years, she hasn't made the cut.

The break's too short and the girls are back on the floor. Fenny (#14) hits every step and is one of the few who is still smiling. Cheyenne (#61), a social psychology student in pink Lycra tights, lights up only when a camera begins to pan her way.

Anouk (#101) struggles to keep up with the routine. The cameras surround her in a hungry, reality show kind of way.

Will she make the next cut? At the end of the day 60 names will be called. Those girls will move on to the next level—a three-day boot camp full of intensive dancing and training. After the cut, 46 girls will make it to a weekend where the final 36 will be chosen.

'We figure the 46 we send to the gala can dance if they've made it through the boot camp, so that weekend is all about make up, hair and pictures. Then we pick the 36 prettiest girls,' says Hendricks.

As for the 86 who don't make the cut? Well, look for them on the arms of those handsome football players.

