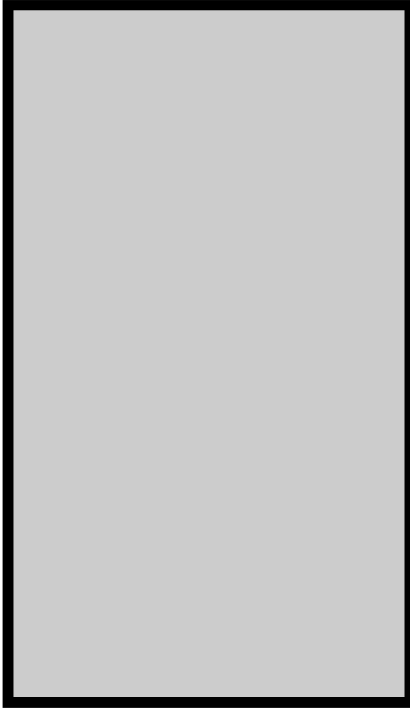


Spreading their Wings to Conquer the Challenge

Challenge Level and Open Level Color Guard teams continue to raise the talent bar during the one-day drill spectacular that annually kicks off the Nationals

Judges, instructors, cadets and long-time Nationals spectators rarely come to a consensus on anything. This year however, they all agreed on one thing -- *the Challenge Level competition is getting tougher and tougher!* Competitors really put in the practice time and it showed. Thirty-six well-disciplined and well-trained schools bringing forty-seven competition teams burned up the drill deck at the Challenge Level competition at the 1999 Nationals.

The five team events within the Armed & Unarmed Divisions (Inspection, Regulation, Color Guard, Squad/Element Exhibition and Platoon/Flight Exhibition), as well as stand alone Color Guard competition gave these proud teams a chance to display what they have worked so hard to achieve throughout the year. The 1999 Challenge Level featured schools from across the United States who came to the Nationals with both barrels loaded!



United South High School grabbed top honors in the 1999 Armed Challenge Level competition.

Armed Division

The Marine Corps made an assault on the top in 1999. The *Panther Rifles* armed drill team from United South HS grabbed the overall championship by earning 1st place in three of five team events (Inspection, Squad & Platoon Exhibition). The tight-knit group from Laredo, Texas built on their impressive showing in 1998 both on and off the drill deck, displaying both a fierce competitive spirit and the will and desire of true champions.

The Deerfield Beach HS Marine Corps unit put together a super effort gaining the Armed Runner-up title. The *Scarlet Bucks* drill team gained a top

three finish in three of the five team events, paced by a 1st place Armed Regulation that was led by Armed Commander's Trophy champion C/Cdr Carvalho. Their first attendance at the Nationals was impressive as this Deerfield Beach, Florida program made the statement that they are a force to be reckoned with at the Nationals.

Other outstanding Armed Division performances included: Cedar Shoals HS (2nd-Platoon Ex, 5th-Squad Ex, Inspection & Regulation); Grove City HS (2nd-Inspection, 4th-Regulation & Platoon Ex); Winnsboro HS (1st-Color Guard); Topeka HS (2nd-Regulation & Commander's Trophy); Woodlawn HS (2nd-Color Guard); Clearwater HS (3rd-Inspection & Regulation); Perry County Central HS (3rd-Color Guard); Forest Park HS (3rd-Squad Ex) and North Augusta HS (4th-Inspection & Squad Ex, 5th-Platoon Ex).

Unarmed Division

Just as in the Armed Division, a returning team built on their strong 1998 finish to grasp the overall title. Forest HS snuck up on everyone and grabbed the Unarmed Challenge Level Championship. The *Wildcats* drill team from Ocala, Florida won with solid performances in all five team events, despite winning just three trophies (3rd-Flight Exhibition, 4th-Color Guard, 5th-Inspection). The gritty Air Force JROTC program was inspired by C/Cdr Fritz winning the Unarmed Commander's Trophy. Every point counted as the high flying drill team nudged away several tough competitors nipping at their heels.

Just missing the top spot was the always-impressive ladies from Rahway HS. The hard charging *Lady Devil Pups* from Rahway, New Jersey excelled within the basic side of the competition capturing 1st place in Inspection and Regulation, and garnering a 3rd place finish within Color Guard competition. Only a tough 13th place finish in Element Exhibition cost them the title. These Marines represented themselves and their service well, missing the overall Unarmed title by just 44 points out of 6,000!

Other strong Unarmed Division performances were found throughout the event, highlighted by: Pine Ridge HS (1st-Color Guard); Denbigh HS (1st-Flight Ex); Forestville HS (1st-Element Ex); Winnsboro HS (2nd-Inspection, 3rd-Regulation & Element Ex); James F. Byrnes HS (2nd-Flight Ex, 3rd-Inspection); Jardines De Ponce HS (2nd-Regulation, 5th-Flight Ex); Rayville HS (2nd-Element Ex, 4th-Flight Ex); and Sandalwood HS (2nd-Color Guard).

Open Level Color Guard

Strong teams with exceptional Color Guard units came together within the Open Level Color Guard. The judges were staggered by the level of excellence on display at this prestigious event. Blowing away the competition was first-time attendee St. Cloud HS. Their near flawless routine left the judges' jaws on the floor. The *Bulldogs* color guard from St. Cloud, Florida earned a record 1,166 out of 1,200 possible points!

Other top-finishing schools earning Open Level Color Guard trophies were spread across the United States. These trophy winners were:

- 2nd place: MacArthur HS - Irving, TX
- 3rd place: Florida Air Academy - Melbourne, FL
- 4th place: Westover HS - Fayetteville, NC
- 5th place: Rayville HS - Rayville, LA

Knockout Drills and a spirited Awards Ceremony were held immediately following the conclusion of the team competition. The lively Awards Ceremony gave recognition to the individuals and the schools who excelled and made the 1999 Challenge Level competition another huge success.

We at Sports Network salute the Challenge level attendees at the Nationals. We were honored by their strong efforts. Win or lose, each of these schools made their mark and bettered their program through their attendance at the Nationals.