

## **WHO ARE THE BEST DANCERS? WHO HAS THE BEST CLUB?**

Recently, a statement was made at a dance, one which I've heard quite a few times over my years as a square dance caller. The statement, "our club's dancers are the best". Over the years, this declaration was often made by individuals who were comparing the proficiency of their club's members to those of other clubs. The declaration was stating their club could dance (insert level or degree of difficulty) whereas other clubs were not nearly as expert, therefore their dancers were better. I've heard that a particular caller uses more (again insert level or degree of difficulty) therefore he is a better caller and the dancers who dance to him (or her) are the best dancers.

I have noticed that only the dancer's or caller's dexterity around higher levels of dance or higher level of difficulty were used to measure what made them the best. I have also noticed that very few of the people who made that declaration are still dancing today. Those who still dance are no longer with the club or caller who once was "the best". A great caller once shared that when the standard of greatness is set by how close to perfect a dancer or caller can push, then it surely can't last. The "best" by that measure can't sustain itself, after all when you are the "hottest of hot-shots", no caller or dancer will ever be good enough for long; there is always someone "hotter" coming along.

I believe the wrong standard was used to determine what being the best really is. As a caller with both an active home program and a travel calling schedule, many dancers have been on the dance floor before me. I have called for clubs of varying size, median age, dance experience, etc. and feel that every dance was great; some were even better! On this experience I have built my opinion and while it may differ from what you have heard, I hope you will give it your consideration. Here is what it means to declare "our club's dancers are the best".

1. The dancer's happy feeling in the dance hall. There are few times more joyful than being present at a dance where everyone is happy. Happy as they come into the hall. Happy to see old friends and greet new friends. Happy to experience the joy of moving to music. Happily applauding after each tip. Happy to be present in the moment. It is a feeling that builds the dynamic of a club.
2. Friendly. A group of dancers that understand square dancing is inclusive and are quick to make sure visitors are included in squares along with those folks who don't have partners. This club doesn't have a problem with everyone "setting their squares" in advance because they understand that act alone leads to hurt feelings. Every dance tip is with their friends, because everyone is their friend.
3. Smooth dancing. Maybe the best way to describe smooth dancing is to tell you what it is not. It is not pushing or pulling other dancers around in the square. It is not expecting to be pushed or pulled in order to get through a tip. It is not grabbing on and/or holding on too tight. It is a joy to watch smooth dancing and an even greater joy to be the square with smooth dancers.
4. Helpful with those who need help. The dancers who point with their fingers to help an adjacent dancer who may look confused. The dancers who go up to another dancer after the tip to offer help in understanding a particular call. Helpful by not talking during a tip, even if the square breaks down and in fact, discouraging others from talking. Helpful in getting squares quietly back into lines of four so the square can rejoin the dance.

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5. Thankful. After the tip, taking the time to thank everyone for dancing then staying to the end of the dance for a loud "thank you". Thankful for the service others providing in setting up the hall and kitchen then graciously lending a hand without being asked. Thankful for the gift of being part of something so joyful.

You've probably noticed that not once was dancer ability mentioned. It's just not that important. Frankly, no one has ever joined square dancing because they wanted to be pushed into being the perfect dancer. People who don't already square dance want what we have in items one through five above. Read through them again and look at the groups subscribing to them, there you will find "our club's dancers are the best". Make it your declaration.

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