

Summer Band: Sunrise on the Practice Field

Wallace Dierolf

All over the great state of Texas bands begin to gather. Directors, students and parents wonder what this year's band will be like. It all starts over in a sense. A fresh beginning mixed with excitement, nervous anticipation and various levels of experience. The band returns. Each year new challenges present themselves...and it all begins with the time honored tradition of summer band.

Marching and instrumental fundamentals must be reviewed, taught and practiced. The upper classmen are anxious for the moment when they can begin to work on the new drill. The freshmen are taking it one day at a time. Like a newborn pony, the band searches for its balance and identity.

Having taught at three different high schools during the course of my twenty-nine year teaching career I learned a few things about summer band. Some lessons I learned the hard way, some I learned by drawing on the experience of my peers, some I discovered on my own, and some came from careful observation of my students.

It is important to remember that our number one priority is the

safety of our students. Making the summer band experience a safe one is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the concern we have for our students' well-being. By taking a few simple steps, a little time, and some planning, this objective can be easily met.

Check your outdoor classroom. Inspect the practice field long before your students arrive for the first day of practice and keep checking it each day. Grass fields should be inspected for insects, large rocks and holes. Both grass and paved practice fields need to be checked for broken glass or other litter that might be a hazard. I always enjoyed my early morning walks on the practice field.

Take time to educate yourself and your students about dealing with heat related problems and illness. The American Red Cross has many excellent first aid books as well as lots of information on their web site dealing with this

topic. I remember the day the San Antonio press (with TV cameras) paid me a visit during summer band one year. I was excited about their visit and very anxious

to talk about my students and their band family. Of course, all they wanted to do was talk about the students practicing in the heat and how prepared I was to deal with any heat related health problems. They came looking for a story they didn't find. Why? Because myself, and more importantly my students, were well informed and

taking all the right steps to deal with "Mr. Sun."

Rather than go into a very lengthy summary of the vast amount of information available through sources such as the Red Cross in the dealing with the Texas summer heat, allow me to give you one suggestion you may not have thought about. Let the weather conditions dictate how much time



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you spend outside each day. Spend more time outside on cooler days and less on hot days. Seems fairly logical doesn't it? Follow Mother Nature, not your watch. Apply the same logic in reference to breaks. Continue to teach your students and yourself about how to deal with the heat...everyday.

Summer band is another good opportunity to educate your students on a major health issue facing the American teenager—the automobile and the teenage driver. I strongly suggest you do not allow your students to leave the campus in their cars during breaks and if you do, drive home (pun intended) this message. Do not have another student in a car you (the teenager) are driving unless both sets of parents are fully aware of the situation. As teachers I feel strongly that we have an obligation to constantly remind students to drive with caution and responsibility.

Keeping students motivated during summer band is another wonderful opportunity for you to grow as a teacher. The educational process is only as good as the individual teacher standing in front of a group of students at any given moment in time. The best motivational tool is good teaching. The best teaching tool is creativity. Creativity is a joyful celebration of the mind. The creative process is exciting and summer band is the perfect time to think outside the box. Try new techniques, have fun, experiment.

Creativity and safety, a simple combination, don't let the sun rise on the practice field without them.

Create simple drills using basic marching and playing fundamentals. Don't write these down for yourself or your students. Create them "on the spot." Think of it as marching band improvisation. Let me give you an example of how easy this is to do.

Have the students form a block band formation. Start to call out short drills. Band, forward march sixteen and halt. Band, forward march sixteen, back step eight and halt. Band, forward march sixteen, back step eight, forward march eight, and halt. Band, forward march sixteen, back step eight, forward march eight, mark time eight and halt. Then add the tones of a major scale to the drill or play some of your fight song or better yet, create a melodic line of your own.

After you do this with the students a few times divide the band up into sections and have the section leaders, drum majors, and various student leaders create their own drill with music. Then watch the power of creativity motivate your band... and all the while they are practicing fundamentals. You can even have a contest between sections if you'd like. Be sure the band watches each group perform and have the students evaluate their command of fundamentals. Be sure to establish parameters, such as the number of counts used in the total drill and give them specific marching maneuvers to use in their drill.

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presenting two clinics
at the Convention/
Clinic on how to
build, maintain,
improve and protect
the Band Booster Club.**

Wallace (Wally) Dierolf received a Music Education Degree with honors, from St. Mary's University and a Master of Music Degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Upon his retirement as Director of Bands and Fine Arts Department Head at Sandra Day O'Connor High School the new band hall was named in his honor. Wallace is a member of TBA, TMEA, TMAA and Phi Beta Mu.