



Taking the *Leap* at Loyola: Dance Team Edition

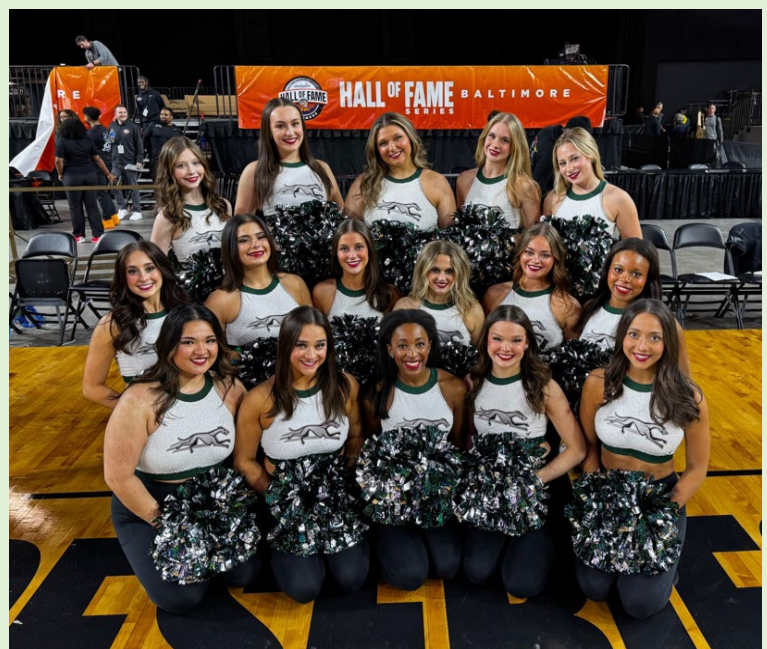
By Ava Karolus

When I was in your shoes, just about a year ago, the pressures of college were immense, and honestly all I could think about. *What will I do with my career? Who will my roommate be? What activities will I get involved in?* These questions spun in my head like a broken record. Always on repeat. Always on my mind. However, there's one thing I was sure about: dance. I knew I wanted to keep dancing in college, but I had too many worries about making my continuous passion possible in this new chapter of my life.

That's why I'm here to hopefully answer your questions, ease your concerns, and express why joining the Loyola University Dance Team was the best decision I ever made.

Who is LUDT?

LUDT is the official Division I dance team of Loyola University Maryland. Here, we support Loyola Athletics as well as the community on and off campus. We serve our community by promoting school spirit in many ways, like attending and performing at soccer, volleyball, and lacrosse games. However, most of our season is focused on men's and women's basketball games. Livia, junior dancer on LUDT, offered her personal insight and excitement about basketball games here at Loyola, and how our team plays such an integral role. "It is so important to bring that school spirit atmosphere," she mentions "and that is something that we bring." She goes on to exclaim, "If you are a dancer, please try out because game days are one of my favorite parts!" Gamedays are one of the most



exciting parts about being a part of this team. Performing courtside at these games is so rewarding and an incredible opportunity to show school spirit in support of the men and women's teams!

Our main focus in the spring semester is our trip to Daytona Beach, Florida, to compete and represent Loyola at NDA College Nationals. Personally, this part of the LUDT experience is my absolute favorite. It builds the utmost comradery and sportsmanship within the team and creates a pride-filled bond between each dancer and coaches. Having our hard work pay off in the most rewarding way is what makes this program so incredible. Emma, sophomore on LUDT, is a person I turn to for conversations regarding the excitement of nationals.

"Nationals as a whole is a very special thing. There is really no experience like it!" She shares that nationals is our "gametime" as we get to show our hard work that we put into each season. From my recent experience, nationals truly created a closer bond with my teammates, and the feeling of performing on stage is something I will never forget!

Values & Expectations

Team values and commitment expectations are pretty straightforward, as our coaches inform us right as we join the team. We value discipline, accountability, and maintaining positive attitudes in and out of practice. We hold ourselves at a high standard, since we are representing not only our program, but Loyola itself. When attending games, specifically, we must lead with enthusiasm, school spirit, and never stop smiling! Our job is to entertain our audiences just as if we were on stage—only this time on the court in front of students and faculty members.

This year, particularly, the team talked a lot about mindset. Committing to a team this intense, you may encounter challenges, both mentally and physically, but it is important to remember why we chose this team in the first place. Sharing common values and ideals, which are open for discussion, brings the team much closer and unites us as one. We implement these conversations in many team bonding activities, such as vision board night, and team meetings throughout the season. Engaging in conversations throughout the year is one of my favorite aspects about Dance Team. Getting to talk openly about expectations and goals for each season makes this team unstoppable and determined to overcome anything.

Managing Your Time Effectively



Time management was my biggest concern when considering joining LUDT. However, as I am approaching my second year on this team, I can assure you not to worry about it. I am a very organized person, so it was pretty seamless for me to incorporate my organizational skills into my life here at Loyola, both for school and dance. I am an Elementary Education major, which requires lots of work outside of class, such as visiting nearby schools and tutoring young children. This can be time consuming alone and adding practices on top of that may seem overwhelming. But I promise you—it's no big deal. Izzy, freshman on LUDT, is a biology major here at Loyola. Her advice to incoming freshmen worried about time management is, "you just have to make a routine for yourself" and "when your schoolwork and assignments die down you can focus on dance and make that your priority." My advice? Academics ALWAYS come first. The coaches demonstrate flexibility with academic commitments which may interfere with dance commitments, and show understanding with scheduling issues.

Sisterhood

The relationships we form on this team truly last a lifetime, as alumni keep in touch still to this day! As a first-year student at college, I felt overwhelmed trying to meet new people and build friendships; however, LUDT made it effortless. Here, teammates become sisters. Senior on LUDT, MK, a huge advocate for sisterhood within our team, told me "I am a sister outside of Loyola... I always know that I have people that I can go to on this campus, on good days and bad days." You'll have the privilege of going to practice every day and surrounding yourself with people who love you, will always support you, and who constantly provide a shoulder to lean on. You will encounter tough times, especially as a freshman, so it's refreshing to know everyone is here for you and will lift you up when you are down. I've had my fair share of tough times with homesickness, friend drama, and more since being here. The girls on this team give me their unwavering support, as everyone cares about one another. This is something I will always treasure and share with teammates who join this program in the future.

Why choose LUDT?

Joining LUDT has taught me so much about myself. I have learned from new experiences, grown as a stronger dancer, and have become a more



confident and driven person. Time flies by, but I have to remember why I joined this team in the first place. I joined because dancing is a part of who I am, and now LUDT remains a part of my identity at this university.

I encourage you to find your why and trust the journey.

College is about finding yourself, your passions, and doing what you love. I love this team because it allowed me to find myself. My coaches and my teammates are now a part of "my why," and I hope you're reading my experience feeling more inspired and eager to find your "why" on LUDT. I'll leave you with this message from LUDT Head Coach, Christina George: "This is a really close community. [Dance Team] is a really safe space for people to be vulnerable and also to learn and to grow. We have the opportunity to be competitive while representing our university is something that's really unique to our sport that not everybody gets to do. That's a completely unique experience that someone could have in college, and this is a great place to do it!"

