

Our Side of the Mic

An article sponsored by the Denver Area Callers & Cuers Association

Bob Riggs ... Summer 2023

As we call in the region, we are challenged by events where the capabilities of the dancers have a wide range. We call each dance using our very best skills and experience to call to the capability of those who are attending. Dancers often have attended a class, refresher workshop or review session and believe they have achieved the desired competency. We as callers adjust our calling for each dance to match their competency. Thus, every event results in the dancers being thoroughly entertained. We have accomplished the goal we were hired to achieve. However, we have continued to see and experience a slow decline in the capabilities of dancers in the activity. Let's drill a little deeper into the topic of dancer skills.

As expected, our SSD students/newer dancers come out of class with an ability to dance the SSD program calls from most/all of the MS Standard Applications. Most have little experience dancing these calls from standard variations (SAV) or extended application (EA) found in the SSD Program.

The MS dancers who have recently rejoined the activity after the pandemic, believe they can dance MS, but lack the reaction time for some calls when called from the less frequently used formations and arrangements. For example: when executing a Walk & Dodge where the ladies are walking, and the men are dodging there will be a significant delay. Thus, when calling a MS dance callers must increase the time for dancer reaction and execution time will use more helper words to enable dancer success.

The Plus dancers who recently completed a Plus Class can dance the Plus calls from standard arrangements only as the typical class does not sufficiently provide time for them to see and understand the calls from all 6 arrangements. We have dancers who can dance the Plus tip at a MS dance where a limited vocabulary is called. We have other dancers who excel in their Plus and can dance a more challenging Plus program such as found at Plus.com. And we have dancers that excel in their ability to dance MS/Plus for a variety of extended application formations and arrangements, such as found at Moonlight Madness, Diamond Squares, and Red Hot Country Plus.

THUS, from a caller's perspective we don't have SSD, MS or PLUS programs, we have a stated program for a dance, but must either add or reduce difficulty depending on the dancers in the hall. This makes caller preparation for a dance very difficult. Experienced callers can adapt to the circumstances, but newer callers will find the situation very difficult.

To stabilize our dance activity, our callers and clubs must work toward improving the competency of our dancers within their current chosen program. This means we must allow dancers within each program to participate and enjoy their program of choice. We must stop the rush to PLUS by discouraging unprepared dancers from taking Plus classes. We must encourage our SSD dancers to stay in their groups and enjoy the pleasures of dance. We must encourage MS dancers to stay in their clubs and not attempt PLUS until they are truly ready. And most of all we must provide opportunities for dancers in their program to strive to perfect their execution and enjoyment of their program calls, i.e., continuing education. We must ensure that the activity does not lose its ability to entertain with variety. For example, we have dancer success if we call the sequence Swing Thru – Spin the Top, but we will lose some of the dancers on the floor if we call the sequence Spin the Top – Swing Thru. Our activity has slowly over the years moved from our ability to do true hash calling to one where certain sequences will be successful and other sequences may fail.

We must encourage groups/clubs to encourage us, the callers, to include a quick teach of a call that some are having trouble with when appropriate. This, along with continuous recruiting for nearly year-round class opportunities, will allow our activity to grow.