

Cheerleading boys prepare to take on the girls

Europe's first all-male cheerleaders have been busy in training as they prepare to take on the girls in a championship.

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The DAZL Diamonds Peewee Boyz from Middleton, south Leeds, have already taken home a third place trophy at the British Cheerleading Association (BCA) international championships held in Coventry in July and hope to wow judges in the BCA Northern Classics later this year.

The squad, made up of eight boys aged between six and 12, have been together for nearly a year and have had to deal with their fair share of teasing since coming clean about their girl-dominated pastime.



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Peewee Boyz captain Joe English, 11, from Belle Isle, West Yorkshire, said: "I kept it a secret for quite a while until January and then I just said 'tease me, I don't care'."

Dance instructor Ian Rodley, 26, is head coach and the brains behind the squad, which he said is only one of four other all-boy teams in the world today.

He said: "I just think it's good to challenge who can dance and who can cheer. There's lots in the media at the moment about girls doing sports that are predominantly male so why not boys doing something that's predominantly female?"

The Peewee Boyz team is a sister project of Dance Actions Zone Leeds (DAZL), funded through Leeds Primary Care Trust, and has so far proved effective in bringing together the Middleton community.

Mr Rodley said: "On our cheer dance programme we have around 2,000 young people and in the DAZL Diamonds competitive squad we have around 100 and all their families.

"They're all from inner-city deprived areas so I think this group not only gives the young people something to do but it brings the whole family together because we rely solely on the family support for fundraising. The actual project is not funded by anyone so they had to raise £17,000 just to get to the competition."

But it's not always three cheers for the boys as the youngsters said they occasionally feel intimidated by their female contemporaries.

Peewee Boy Harvey Pratt, 8, from Belle Isle, said: "It can be quite scary actually because girls are more flexible than boys. I thought we'd get lower than third in Coventry.

"Most of us in here are flexible as well but not a lot of us. Some of us can get in the splits and split jumps but not all of us."

The boys have been working hard to perfect their routine, complete with a uniform of DAZL Diamonds black hooded tops and pink and purple pom poms, with the hope of taking home another trophy in the BCA Northern Classics in Blackpool on November 15.

And they said it's not just the hard work and trophies that inspires them to carry on cheering, and they would encourage everyone to get involved.

Elliott Morgan, 11, from Belle Isle, is also part of the Peewees. He said: "I'd tell people it's really good and really fun. It's a good way of keeping fit and good exercise.

Team-mate Harvey said: "I'd tell them more about it so they get into it more and might join."

And captain Joe added: "He'll get teased but it'll wear off. I don't get teased anymore now, everyone knows about it."