

Why dance should be considered a sport by Caitlyn

What makes a sport a sport?

I would like to start by asking all of you to raise your hands if you believe dance is a sport. Try not to think too much about it and let your first thought be your answer.

Hi, my name is Caitlyn Sheridan and I have been an Irish dancer for over 10 years. I would like to talk about what makes a sport a sport, but specifically why dance is a sport and should be seen as one.

The term "sport" has varying definitions. The Oxford Dictionary describes the word as "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment." Based on this definition, dance should be considered a sport. Here's why...

Whenever I get asked whether I play a sport, my first response is "yes, I dance". This has had its fair share of strange looks, as everyone says "that doesn't count, you're not competing for anything and it's not even difficult like other sports". My response to this is always the same, "I would love to see you try and dance". Dancers put an extreme amount of pressure on their bodies which can sometimes lead to exhaustion and injury just like any other physical activity. A professional dancer can spend about seven hours a day, six days a week dancing and it can also be an extremely competitive sport. This is an important topic to me as Irish dance is a physically demanding sport and we train our muscles to propel us across the dance floor for several hours a week. Imagine training so hard at something you feel so passionately about. And imagine being told your passion wasn't good enough to even be considered a 'real' sport.

I would like to talk more about what makes a sport a sport. Firstly, if you can improve your performance by improving your conditioning, it's a sport. If you can physically train for it, it meets this aspect of the definition. It's not just the actual exertion, it's the ability that is being exerted. Second, there needs to be an actual physical "skill" involved. By that, I mean that there are individual elements that can be developed to enhance a greater ability. For instance, in football, catching the ball is a skill. Hitting a baseball is a skill. Third, there has to be a competition to see who is a winner. If there is no competition, it is not a sport. For example, darts, although competitive, does not take physical exertion but does take physical skill, so I would argue this is not a sport.

In 1997, The International Olympic Committee officially announced it will add breakdancing to the Games under the name breaking. Breaking, of course, is a style of hip-hop dance that includes footwork and athletic moves like back or head spins. Unfortunately, breakdancing was voted out to be in the Olympics but at least it was considered to begin with. Every time I watch the Olympics, I find myself asking why my sport doesn't get to be part of it. Sure, you could argue that dance is more of an art form than a sport but isn't figure skating artistic? What about gymnastics? Well, I decided to get to the bottom of it and find out the answers to our burning questions. Why isn't dancing in the Olympics? Might it be included someday? The Olympic Charter indicates that in order to be accepted, a sport must be widely practiced by men in at least 75 countries and on four continents and by women in no fewer than 40 countries and on three continents. Overall, Irish dancing is only practiced in 30 countries.

Therefore it cannot be in the olympics, but i ask all of you to consider dance a sport as that is what it is. So if in the future, dance reaches the Olympic requirements, it will at least be considered. Olympic dance would, arguably, promote the female image in sport. Women have always played a predominant role in dance; it's one of the few sports where the pictured stereotype is a woman. Including dancing in the Olympics would generate more respect and attention to dancing but also to women in sport in general.

What is a hobby? A hobby is an activity done regularly in one's leisure time for pleasure. I have suffered many injuries from irish dancing including dislocating my knee, tearing ligaments and have had multiple sprained ankles. I also have osgood schlatters disease meaning any physical activity is painful on my knees. Of course I love irish dancing and choose to do it for enjoyment...but pleasure? I dance to win.

A few weeks ago, I placed 5th at my first world championships. There were people competing from Russia, America, Ireland, Ukraine, Australia, Hong Kong, Hungary, China and it is still seen as a hobby. Even though irish dance is unable to be in the Olympics, surely the fact that we are competing with people from many other countries from around the world is not only a leisure activity.

I wanted to see who thought dance was a sport so made a bar chart and recorded people's responses from our year. I made three categories. Sport, hobby and art form here are the results.

As you can see, most people in this class believe that dance is an art form. I was surprised by these results as I predicted most people would say hobby, which in fact, the least amount of people said. I understand dance of all forms can be seen as an art as you choreograph this and you wouldn't choreograph something like football. However, I ask all of you. Isn't synchronised swimming choreographed and that's in the Olympics? Isn't figure skating choreographed and that's in the Olympics? Isn't gymnastics choreographed and that's in the Olympics?

I believe this factor outweighs the possibility that dance is an art but is in fact more a sport. Additionally, the "but it is pretty" argument could be made for all of these Olympic sports and no one questions them.

If chess is a sport, why not snakes and ladders?

My final point is about the transformation of dance. What once was a laid-back traditional dancing style has evolved into an aesthetic and athletic sport which at elite level requires all the elements of top sporting performance - speed, acceleration, agility, power, flexibility, mobility, and strength. The athletic nature of Irish dance involves a series of highly complex and powerful movements such as birdies, high kicks, front clicks, jumps, double & triple spins, leaps and landings - all performed at a heart rate of up to 180bpm. The various components of physical fitness are all essential to complete these moves skilfully and with fine control.

I would now like to finish by asking all of you again to please raise your hands if you believe dance is a sport.

Thank you for listening to my speech and I hope your thoughts about what makes a sport a sport has changed.

Has anyone got any questions?

Sport, Hobby or Art

