

Nick and Lindsey from NAL Dance, instructor / event organisers  
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## Understanding Dancesport and Common Reported Injuries

Farah Fadzali, July 2021

Dancesport is a competitive form of ballroom dancing that allows participants to form social relationships and to improve their physical fitness and mental well-being. Competitive dance sport comprises a wide variety of dance styles and forms such as International Latin-American, International Ballroom, American Rhythm and American Smooth. It is internationally recognised with an organised competition structure (International Dance Sport Federation; IDSF, 2011)<sup>5,9</sup>.

### History

The first unofficial Dancesport World Championship took place in 1909, and the first Formation Team was presented in 1932 by Olive Ripman at the Astoria Ballroom in London. Dancesport was first broadcast on TV in 1960.

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In 1997, Dancesport was accepted as a Olympic sport<sup>9,10</sup>. Since the broadcasting of the dancing reality television program 'Strictly Come Dancing' began in England in 2004 and in 36 other countries thereafter, dancesport has become even more popular<sup>9,10</sup>.

## Artistic communication factors in Dancesport

To artistically feel a movement means to simultaneously attribute to its sublime and technical connotations. When the connection between music and dance is realised through the specific choreography, technique and artistic-interpretative experience, the level of spectacle is achieved, which is the characteristic of the dance competition<sup>6</sup>.



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Based on the iceberg theory, a communication process in dancesport comprises of two levels: External process (embodiment) and Internal process (qualities and skills)<sup>6</sup>. Artistic communication also requires both the sender and the receiver to have certain abilities compatible with emotional intelligence (Fig. 1)<sup>1,2,6,10</sup>.

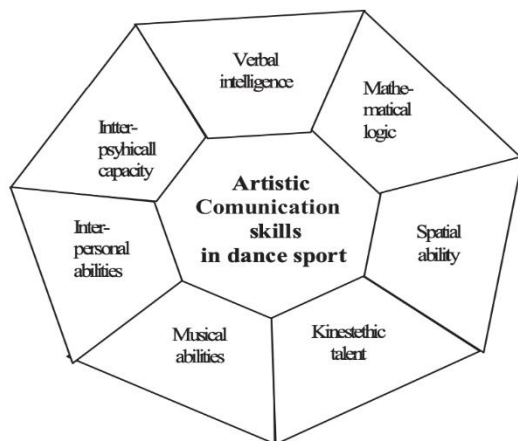


Fig. 1 Artistic Communication Skills in DanceSport<sup>2</sup>

#### Definition:

Verbal intelligence - is necessary for the enunciation of ideas while *logic* puts together the scenario and reasoning behind the role of interpretation.

Logic - puts together the scenario and reasoning behind the role interpretation

Inter-psychical abilities - translation of thinking into language and motion

Musical talent - interpretation of music

Spatial capacity - for creating choreography in accordance with the space and movement in the chosen perimeter

Kinesthetic capacity - the capacity to artistically coordinate the movement

Interpersonal abilities - the engine of artistic communication

As such, dancesport performers requires good artistic communication training that

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involves theoretical knowledge, a training model and interpretation based on a scenario and a role to play. It also requires specific nonverbal communication training (motion)<sup>2,6</sup>.



Nick and Lindsey from NAL Dance,  
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Photo credit: Blackpool Festival  
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## Common injuries reported in Dancesport

The common injuries reported in Dancesport are the neck, shoulder, spine, knee, lower leg, and foot<sup>9</sup>. Researchers noted that the injuries were mostly found in the lower extremities similar to figure skaters<sup>3,4,9</sup>. This is similar to other dance genres, but dancing in continuous proximity with gender-specific techniques could lead to different injury patterns. Dancesport can fall within the very heavy to extremely heavy category under energy expenditure and utilizes both aerobic and anaerobic energy systems. Alpha-beta\* and heart rate variability intervention techniques are reported to successfully enhance performance in dancers<sup>8,9</sup>.

\*: Different frequency bands of receptors in the autonomic nervous system (refers to the system that regulates your bodily function; it also controls the fight or flight response)

## Common cause of injuries

Besides the long hours of training and insufficient rest, some potential cause of injuries stem from the attire (heels) and the movement itself. For example, calf flexibility is imperative for dancesport dancers because all female dancers are required to wear heels which tends to tighten the calves and limits dancer's ankles mobility<sup>7,8,9</sup>.

Many ballroom/dancesport dancers also have excessive tightness in their hip flexor muscles. One of the causes would be doing multiple *Jive Kicks* (the action of bringing the knee up and flicking the feet quickly towards the ground activating the hip flexor muscles). Another causation would be attributed to the posture observed - dancing in an extended position whilst trying to focus on softening in the hips for *Drives* (a forward moving movement). Having to practice the movement over and over again multiple times, the hip flexors will eventually tighten up if stretching is not involved. This can be seen in the increase in the number of

ballroom dancers with lower back pain<sup>8,9</sup>. The above mentioned are some examples of injury causes and there are much more to unpack.

## Conclusion

Compared to ballet and contemporary dancers, who are hired by dance companies, in dancesport the dancers are similar to a self-employed business owner where they arrange their own practice and competition schedule. Nevertheless, understanding the importance of proper [fitness application](#) such as [warming up and cooling down](#), [goal setting](#) and [rest](#) is crucial for the longevity of a dancer's career. You can read more about the above mentioned in our articles published previously.



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End



An MSc in Dance Science graduate from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Farah has multiple experience in teaching movement therapy in various organisations in Singapore.

Farah is now a dance science researcher studying injury prevention and performer's health and safety practices. Together with her achievements and qualifications, Farah hopes to work towards the development of dance science research in Singapore.

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