

# Upgraded By Request

*by Martin Duffy, EUSPBA Officer-at-Large*

I had been newly elected as an EUSPBA Officer-at-Large when President Albert McMullin invited members of the Executive Committee to sit in on the meetings of various technical committees last December. Of all the meetings, the one I found the most interesting was the Grading Committee. While I admit to not paying much attention during the hours when the committee sorted out what seemed like a billion piping soloists, I did perk up at the mention of the pipe bands. What struck me after only minutes of the band portion of this meeting was my misconception of how this process takes place. What it boils down to is the importance of a letter—the importance of a request.

“Upgraded By Request” is a misunderstood phrase. To many of us, it took away the legitimacy of the upgrade. In other words, it indicated that the band was moved up only because they asked to be moved up. To many of us, it meant that they begged their way up. It was not as good as having a slamming year that made the Grading Committee want to push them up by themselves. Now, having attended a Grading Committee meeting, I understand the importance of the letter of request. This goes for individuals and for bands, for upgrades and for downgrades. The Grading Committee looks for these letters. They may promote a band or an individual without such a letter, but they want input on where the competitor wants to head. They want to know if the band or the individual is ready for the change and if they are making preparations for it.

Let us take bands, for example. The Grading Committee considers how well each band performed the previous year. This committee, chosen by Chairman Doug Ross, contains judges from throughout our association. So, when the name of a band does come up, there are at least a few judges in the room who have judged this band over the past season. They do take into account their own experience of having judged that band. They also have access to results and can see if “AGL” (Above Grade Level) was checked off at some of the band’s contests. These things can be taken into account.

Many factors however, cannot be taken into account without a letter from the band. Has the band lost personnel since the previous season? Have they gained personnel? Most significantly, have they gained or lost musical leadership? Have they been working on the tune requirements for the next grade? Do they feel ready for the next grade? Do they even have the minimum numbers of players for the next grade? And most importantly, what does the band want to do? To the credit of the Grading Committee, they want to see these letters. They want input from the bands. They want input from the soloists. They want you to tell them where you want to go and they want you to make your case for it.

So, when next season is over, figure out what you want to do and drop a line to the Executive Secretary, who will pass your letter on to the Grading Committee. Don’t be shy. If you are the Pipe Major of a Grade 5 band and you had a good season, don’t wait to be “forced up.” Tell the committee you would be honored to move up. If you are a Grade 3 drummer and you took a few prizes and you have been learning from one of the best at a summer school, go ahead and write the committee. Tell them you want to be in Grade 2 so you can play an MSR and work three times as hard to earn your medal. Are you leading a band that has not been able to compete for the last year or two? Maybe you want to drop down a grade to make competition more of a possibility. But that might not happen until you put pen to paper. Tell them what you want. Speak up. And whether or not they grant your request, go out the following season and compete proudly.