



GYMNASTICS
MASTERING THE ART
OF FLEXIBILITY

.....
HOW TO IMPROVE TECHNIQUE

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Gymnastics: Mastering the Art of Flexibility

How to Improve Technique

by Karen S. Roberts

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1- WHAT IS GYMNASTICS- A BRIEF HISTORY

Gymnastics is a performance sport in which the competitors perform exercises that require, among other abilities, control, balance, flexibility, and physical strength.



The sport of competitive gymnastics is presided over by the Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG). Each country also has a ruling body linked to the FIG. The most popular of the competitive gymnastics sports is the artistic competition. This consists of women's performances on the vault, floor exercise to music, the balance beam, and the uneven bars. The men's performances are on the high bar, parallel bars, vault, still rings, pommel horse, and floor exercise without music.

Gymnastics routines were developed from exercises that the ancient Greeks used. These included circus performance skills and the skills of dismounting and mounting a horse. In addition to artistic gymnastics, which is the most popular type, disciplines consist of these: acrobatic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline, aerobic gymnastics, and tumbling.

A Brief History

Gymnastics is one of the longest existing sports, having been in existence for more than 2000 years. But it was not always a sport that was competitive and organized. It goes back to the ancient Greeks, who practiced gymnastics in order to prepare for war. The original form created from the Greek sport still exists today, but people of the Middle East and Asia had their own forms of the sport. The core of original gymnastics involved tumbling, jumping, and running. As early as 800 B.C., gymnastics was used as a part of military training in the Middle East and China. The first record of acrobatic gymnastics came out of ancient Egypt. When the Pharaohs ruled, acrobats often performed for the upper class.

After the collapse of Rome, gymnastics was not as popular. Modern gymnastics has only been in existence from the 1800's. In its latest form, gymnastics has a more artistic feel, and tumbling is the only element that is still in its original form.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries several apparatus were designed to be used by boys and men for exercises. Considered the "father of gymnastics", a German, Friedrich Jahn, is credited with introducing these apparatus: vaulting horse, parallel bars, side horse with pommels, horizontal bar, balance beam, and ladder. In time these apparatus would evolve and change the face of modern gymnastics.

Gymnastics was not introduced to the United States until the mid 1800s.

Gymnastics initially started as a competitive sport at the Olympics in Athens in 1896. It was an all male sport and consisted of atypical elements such as a club swinging and a rope climbing competition which continued into the 1930s. Gymnastics as we know it started to change at the Olympics in Paris in 1924. This was when individual events and team competition started to be included.

Women did not participate in gymnastics events until the 1920s. The first women's Olympic competition was held in 1928 in Amsterdam, and the only event that year was synchronized calisthenics. The first combined exercises for women were featured in the 1952 Olympics. Female gymnasts were only involved in a single team event until the Helsinki Olympics in 1952, when seven individual events were included for females. Future Olympics would see that number reduced.

By the 1954 Olympic Games, apparatus and events for both men and women had been standardized in modern format, and scoring standards, including a point system from 1 to 10, were implemented.

Gymnastics events for women included the balance beam and uneven bars. Exercises included combined rhythmic sportive gymnastics, floor exercises and vaulting. Until 1972 the focus was on power and strength for the men. During the same time women's performances were all about the grace of movement.

In 1952 at Helsinki, the Soviet Union made a strong Olympic debut. They swept the gold medals for the women's and men's teams. The all-around individual titles went to two gymnasts from the Ukraine. Maria Gorokhovskaya set a modern Olympic record for receiving the most individual medals in a single Olympics when she won five silver medals and two gold medals, winning the female's all-around title. The most decorated Olympic female gymnast, Larisa Latynina, also from Russia. She was awarded 18 medals in 1964, 1960 and 1956, setting the record for the most individual Olympic medals won in a sport by an athlete.

Japanese men dominated the gymnastics arena for a number of years, beginning in the Olympics in Rome in the 1960's. The Japanese won five consecutive gold medals in the team events. This was broken in 1980 when they boycotted the Moscow Olympics. One Japanese male gymnast, Sawao Kato, was awarded three all-around medals, in 1968, 1972 and 1976.

Nadia Comaneci, a gymnast from Romania, made history when she became the first female to get a perfect 10 at the Montreal Games in 1976. She scored seven 10s and won the gold medal in the all-around competition. At the 1984 Olympics, an American, Mary Lou Retton, became the first U.S. Gymnast to win the gold medal for the all-around event. At that Olympics she scored perfect tens in vault and floor exercise.

The men's team from the United States delivered a major upset to win the gold at the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984. In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the U.S. women's team brought home the gold for the first team title. Then in the 2004 Athens Olympics, Paul Hamm, was the first American to win the men's all-around competition.

2005 brought in a code of points system to replace the prior system of scoring for all events. Standard perfection no longer has a ranking of ten. Gymnasts have an opportunity to score between thirteen and sixteen points in each of the events, based on the total score of their execution score and difficulty level.

CHAPTER 2- WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF APPARATUS USED IN GYMNASTICS?

Artistic gymnastics has consistently been one of the most popular sports at the Summer Olympics. Let's take a look at the various types of apparatus that are used to perform this type of gymnastics.

Men's Apparatus

Horizontal Bar

The horizontal bar dates all the way back to the ancient Romans and Greeks. It is often referred to as the high bar. It is made up of a steel bar that is suspended and held rigidly in place by a system consisting of vertical supports and cables. When performing on the bar, male gymnasts will usually wear leather grips. Routines that are performed on the horizontal bar are made up of a series of grips such as the mixed, dorsal, under and over. Points are awarded for successfully performing the grips along with releases, turns, in-bar work, and dismount skills. Some of the well known moves are flyaways, the Giant, handstands, swings, and kips. The dismount is extremely important, with the goal of a "stuck landing."

Parallel Bars



Parallel Bars are made of a supporting framework that holds two parallel bars elevated above the floor. Bars are generally made from wood or another material that has some flexibility. If a material other than wood is used for the inner core of the bars, the outer coating is always made from wood. The framework that supports the bars is able to be adjusted. This allows the bars to be set at the perfect height and distance apart for each gymnast. Grips are sometimes worn by gymnasts when performing on the parallel bars.

Among the moves on the parallel bars are handstands, kips, underswings, long swings, and of course, the all important dismount.

Pommel Horse

This apparatus was originally invented many centuries ago to teach soldiers how to mount and dismount a real horse. It is rumored that one was used by Alexander the Great.