

GYMNASTICS

PACKET # 12

INSTRUCTIONS

This Learning Packet has two parts: (1) text to read and (2) questions to answer. The text describes a particular sport or physical activity, and relates its history, rules, playing techniques, scoring, notes and news.

The Response Forms (questions and puzzles) check your understanding and appreciation of the sport or physical activity.

INTRODUCTION

Some people consider gymnastics to be the purest of all sports or athletic activities. The human body can perform movements that are exquisite to behold. For this reason, gymnastics is visually exciting. Yet many casual viewers and enthusiasts alike do not realize how much dedication, skill and training are required on the part of gymnastic performers.

Gymnastics has grown in popularity in the United States, perhaps due to the good press given to this sport in recent Olympic competitions. Currently, there are about 40,000 competing gymnasts in the United States.

HISTORY OF GYMNASTICS

Gymnastics has been popular since ancient Greece. However, “modern” gymnastics began only in the 1820s, when Ludwig Jahn founded gymnasiums, called “Turnverein,” throughout Germany. Jahn also invented equipment, including parallel bars, the horizontal bar, rings and the horse. This equipment is still in use today.

The first gym club was built in America in 1850. The first college to train teachers in gymnastics began in 1865. In 1888, the Amateur Gymnastics Association was founded in England.

Men’s gymnastics was one of the original seven sports included in the first modern

Olympic Games, held at Athens in 1896. Starting in 1928, women were included in the competition. In 1950, the world championships were introduced. They have been held regularly at four-year intervals ever since.

TRAINING REQUIRED

Gymnastics is similar to ballet in terms of the physical demands and personal sacrifice required. Aspiring gymnasts typically start to train seriously when they are about eight years old. Two organizations, the Junior Olympic program of the United States Gymnastic Federation (USGF) and the Junior Olympic Gymnastic Program of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), offer classes for young people from nine to eighteen years of age.

Many high schools and colleges offer comprehensive programs in gymnastics. At the high school level, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA) oversees the rules and regulations for both men and women engaged in gymnastics.

A final state high school championship is the culminating year-end event held annually. College level gymnastics is controlled by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Currently, Eastern European countries, particularly Romania and Russia, dominate the international gymnastics scene. Children in these countries tend to start their training at an earlier age than do American children. Also, the government directs the athletic programs.

These programs tend to combine the best elements of gymnastic training from many different countries.

HOW GYMNASTICS IS PERFORMED

GYMNASTIC TERMS AND MOVES

The following terms illustrate the type of language gymnasts use to describe specific moves. Just as baseball, golf, bowling and other sports have their own language, so does gymnastics. On the next page are some important and frequently-heard terms in gymnastics

Axis An imaginary line around which the body rotates.

Arab spring A move in which the legs come together as the body makes a one-quarter turn (similar to a cartwheel).

Bridge position As the body is in a handstand position, the shoulders move away from the hands while the feet reach toward the floor, slightly apart. The knees are bent and the body forms a wide back arch.

Dislocate On the rings, the legs are thrown up and back as the arms are spread out to the side. The body is arched as the feet are swung back down to touch the floor.

Felge On the parallel bars, the gymnast hangs upside down as he/she turns backward and lets go, re-grasping the parallel bars in the hang or front positions.

Hecht jump A jump executed from the highest of two asymmetrical bars in which the body is folded around the lower bar and continues to circle until the legs point down at a 45-degree angle. The body is then extended from the hips as the gymnast jumps to the floor with legs straightened and arms extended.

Piked position The standard position for performing a variety of exercises in which the knees are straight and the hips flexed as far as possible.

Tuck The body position where the back is rounded and the chin is on the chest. The knees are also bent up to the chest.

Straddle A body position where the legs are apart.

Russian giant A movement done on the horizontal bar. This is also called the inverted giant swing.

Split right angle A move done on both the rings and parallel bars, also known as the “straddle L” position.

TYPES OF GYMNASTICS

The two types of gymnastics most commonly seen in competition are artistic gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics. Artistic events are performed on equipment and on floor mats. In the men’s division, there are six events: floor exercise, pommel horse, still rings, vault, parallel bars and the horizontal bar. The women’s division includes four events: floor exercise, uneven bars, vault and balance beams. Rhythmic gymnastics is a mix of acrobatics, juggling and ballet. Gymnasts are required to perform movements that show off their flexibility and dexterity. Many use balls, ropes, hoops and ribbons as part of the performance. Technically called

“gymnastique moderne,” this form of gymnastics originated in France and is performed only by women.

GYMNASTIC TECHNIQUES

WOMEN’S AND MEN’S GYMNASTIC SKILLS

Below is a sample of traditional women’s and men’s gymnastic skills. Remember, though, that this is just a sample of the many requirements for competition.

Women’s Olympic Vaulting

In competition, the vault exercise is divided into two sections called first and second flight. First flight, or the first half of a movement, is the point at which judges carefully watch the take-off, including the body lifting through the air until it reaches the vault. In the second flight, moves from the vault to the dismount are stressed, including balance, stretch of the body and general direction.

Men’s Floor Exercises

Judges base their opinions on how well a gymnast combines motions in a rhythmic way. Skips, jumps, handsprings, and other movements must be combined in such a way as to make it look as if the routine is one continuous movement covering the entire floor space. Flexibility, balance, hold and strength, as well as creativity, are awarded points. Over-long runs, low height and other flaws in execution will result in points being deducted from the final score.

Women’s Asymmetrical Bar

The routine done on the uneven bars must include constant motion. A gymnast is allowed only two momentary rests to regain balance. Judging is based on the passage of the body between the bars, the different hand grips on each bar, the suspension, and the degree of difficulty of the movements in the routine.

Men’s Horizontal Bar

The key to doing well in competition is to include at least one movement where both hands are taken off the bar. The bar then is grabbed again. Other crucial movements include the forward and backward giant swings, free hip circles and turns. The gymnast must be in constant motion for this entire routine to avoid losing points.

Women's Balance Beam

The balance beam is sixteen and a half feet long and four inches wide. It tests a female athlete's balance as she performs jumps leaps, turns, runs and walks across the entire length of the beam. The entire routine lasts between 80 and 105 seconds. Three short stops are allowed to regain balance. If the gymnast falls, she can start again within ten seconds.

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

Equipment for gymnastics includes:

- Parallel bars Men's horizontal bar
- Women's asymmetrical bar Horse
- Women's balance beam Static rings

Clothing for gymnastics is usually form-fitting and flexible, such as leotards and gysuits. For major competitions, costumes are often worn.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET

GYMNASTICS

NAME _____

DATE _____

WHAT TO DO

The following questions will help you to have a greater appreciation and understanding of gymnastics. Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, and write in complete sentences.

1. Why is gymnastics often considered to be the “purest” of all sports or athletic activities?

2. What are some of the physical benefits to be derived from participating in gymnastics?

3. What are the two types of gymnastics most commonly seen in competition and what is the difference between them?

4. Which countries now dominate the international gymnastics scene and why?

5. What is an “axis”? a “felge”? an “Arab spring”?

6. How would you execute a Hecht jump in a gymnastics competition?

7. Describe the vault exercise in women’s Olympic competitions. What do the terms “first flight” and “second flight” have to do with this exercise?

8. What are the criteria for judging the men’s floor exercises in men’s competitions?

9. What is the balance beam exercise test and how is it performed?

10. Why must gymnasts begin to train at a very early age?

Word Search

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use the clues below to discover words in the above puzzle. Circle the words.

1. The inverted giant swing is called a _____ giant
2. This spring is similar to a cartwheel
3. On the rings, when the feet swing down to touch the floor
4. The back is rounded with the chin on the chest
5. When one hangs upside down on the parallel bars and rolls
6. Standard position for doing exercises
7. Jump from higher of two asymmetrical bars
8. Ludwig _____ was the founder of gymnastics
9. One of two types of gymnastics
10. The bars are not at the same height
11. The body forms a wide back arch in a handstand
12. Artistic gymnastics includes a _____ exercise
13. This beam is used in women's gymnastics
14. One of two types of gymnastics
15. The legs are apart
16. The bar used in men's gymnastics
17. Imaginary line around which the body rotates
18. This has two sections - first and second flight
19. The straddle L position is called a _____ right angle
20. Rhythmic gymnastics includes movement similar to this type of dance

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