

SUCCESSFUL GYMNAST:
A HARMONY OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABILITY

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It would be a great understatement to say that competitive gymnastics is tremendously taxing from all view points on young potential athletes. This sport appears to be one in which a great number and variety of factors must be successfully overcome in order to achieve excellence. Many of these factors are biologically predetermined, such as adult height and body build, while others can be affected by the training process, either from a physiological or a psychological perspective.

What are some of the qualities that are required to be a gymnast? From a physical standpoint, it appears that to an increasingly greater extent, there appears to be a common body type that is extremely small in statures, lean and having specific proportions that are advantageous to performance. In comparison to other Olympic athletes, gymnasts are also amongst the strongest and most flexible. These physical qualities must be combined with a great capacity to learn physical skill that requires exacting precision in extremely dangerous and in habitual spatiotemporal situations. This learning must take place over a 5-7 years period, and as such, requires a social support system and parents and friends.

From all of the technical, physical and psychological components that contributed to the ultimate success of the several athletes, only the psychological variables were able to discriminate between the actual competitive rankings of the athletes.

Over the course, the field of applied sport psychology has taken hold of the sport of gymnastics as well as most other well developed fields of physical activity. No longer is physical and technical preparation sufficient for the preparation of champions.

Some of the plans were naively, but often eloquently, created by the athletes themselves based upon the traits and errors from numerous years of competition. Others were developed by the athletes in conjunction with their coaches, a process that was often able to shorten the trial and error process considerably.

A certain number of athletes benefited directly from available published material and from trained individuals in sports psychology. In addition the fact that the available expertise being delivered by sports psychologists either directly, or via their published works, may have missed the mark because of the difficulty in attaining the particular strategies and techniques to the specific demands of the sport of gymnastics.

It is within such a framework that gymnastic coaches, parents and sports administrators would be best advised to consider the developing gymnast, so that these precious individuals might be best nurtured and guided throughout their competitive careers without running the major period of their lives that follow.

It is only now, that such adages as “winning is 10% physical and 90% mental” or to quote yogi Berra ... ‘50% of winning is 90% mental”.

Success and continuance of young gymnasts in the sport is crucial for the development of national teams. Success and persistence in sports is also important to young boys in their social development.

From all the above it can be concluded that a successful gymnast... is a harmony of physical and psychological ability.