

New Vaulting Table

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In January 2003, the new vaulting table will become the official vaulting apparatus for the USA Gymnastics women's program. No more choices, no more debates; the table is here. Any equipment change requires a transition period and training modifications to become successful in your program. Be patient, as the vaulting table is a positive change for the USA Gymnastics women's program as well as the rest of the vaulting world. The table has been introduced and used in international competitions for over a year and the results have been dramatically positive! The men's vaulting program has soared with the new table and the women have also had positive results competing on this new piece of equipment.

In working with the vaulting table, the greatest benefit of the apparatus becomes apparent in the round-off entry vaults. The athletes lose the fear of missing their hands on the vault, thus enabling them to be much more aggressive on their run, hurdle and round-off. Because the vaulting boards are so close to the end of the table on the round-off entry vault, the fear of flipping in front of the horse is also diminished. These changes are producing faster learning times and more aggressive vaults. However, coaches need to be careful not to rush their progressions because they believe there is nothing to worry about anymore. The amount of time for lead up drills is still crucial to a good round-off vault. The preparation for a good round-off entry vault still requires attention to basic drills for the run, hurdle, and body positions on the board. The transition time from the old horse to the new table for athletes that already know how to do a round-off entry vault has been very quick and successful for most athletes. The only real change is where the vaulting board is placed. If the board normally was placed 3'6" from the horse, it will need to be moved in to accommodate for the length of the new table. The only other concern with this vault is if the hands make contact toward the front and the vaulter is not very powerful, the chance of hitting the end of the vault table comes into play. However, even with these problems, I really believe the benefits far out-measure the difficulties of adjusting to the transition of doing a round-off vault on the new table.



So now that we have decided that the table is fine for the Elite program and the small percentage of Junior Olympic athletes that do round-off entry vaults, what about the majority of the athletes from Level 5 through Level 10? Obviously, our compulsory athletes need to develop a good handspring and many of our optional athletes will be doing Tsukaharas, handspring fronts and twisting vaults. In my initial impressions, I thought the most difficulty would come in the development of good compulsory vaults for Levels 5 and 6. I felt the length of the table would be a difficult obstacle, especially for our little compulsory athletes. I thought a tiny 7 or 8 year old would feel this was a tremendous obstacle however, once again in my coaching wisdom, I was wrong! What I have seen is that the length of

the table is less intimidating than the fear of the distance between the board and the old horse. Compulsory athletes have always been afraid of running into the horse or not making the distance between the board and the horse. This fear is less evident with the new table. With the board closer to the table, the athletes seem to be more aggressive. We also teach the athletes how to step down on top of the table from a handstand in the event that they cannot make it over the horse and this has helped ease their fear of hitting their back on the top or end of the table. The other benefit of the table is that the compulsory athletes are stretching towards the end of the table improving their preflight lines and angles for blocking. When teaching your compulsory athletes, spend time on running and board drills. When we first start with the level 5's, we put a large resi at the end of the table and a 4" throw mat that covers 1/2 the table end onto the resi. You do have to keep in mind that the end of the table comes into play on a weak handspring so be careful with your beginner athletes and when spotting.

The most difficult transition to the new table is going to be with the Tsukaharas and handspring front vaults. My optional athletes with twisting vaults have adapted very quickly to the new table and have had very few problems. The Tsuk and front handspring front vaulters have been a greater challenge. The biggest problem we have encountered is the Tsuks because of the hand placement. For the Elite athletes, we were used to teaching a complete 1/2 on to perform a Tsuk, so the athletes were used to being squared to the horse, blocking with both arms at the same time. Due to the length of the new table, this technique will not work very well. We need to look at the technique that the men have used on Tsuks; more of a cartwheel on to the table rather than a 1/2 on technique. You will have to turn 90 degrees onto the table and square out to the table after the block. Remember that only turning 90 degrees on to the table will not be a deduction however, bent arms will be a deduction so be careful not to follow the men's technique totally. Lots of timers and drills when training this vault will be necessary. Extra care should be taken with beginner optional athletes that are learning Tsuks and plan on spending extra time on timers and blocking to high resi mats.

Front handspring front vaults have been a challenge but not like the Tsuks. The biggest problem has been the athletes coming onto the table too high, with their legs past vertical not allowing a good block off of the table. Coaches need to instruct the athletes to stretch as far to the end of the table as possible in order to achieve good preflight angle. A good drill is to take a large resi and put it at the end of the table with an incline mat sticking up and wedge with a resi mat at the end of the table. The athletes have to block up and over the incline mat and onto the resi mat. They should do this drill with not only the Handspring front vaults but with the round-off entry and Tsuk vaults as well.

Although the implementation of the new table has required some extra time to transition from the horse, overall this piece of equipment will be a good change for all of our athletes. Just the fact that the gyms can set one piece of equipment for both the girls and guys is great! Making changes in equipment and the ability to adjust to these changes is what has brought our sport to the unbelievable level it is at today. If you want to get psyched over the new table, watch some films of the men's current National Team, and sit back and watch these guys at work - you will be WOWED!