

COMMON ERRORS TO AVOID

IN ROUTINE CONSTRUCTION

By John Scheer, Mike Cook, Mark Sherman, Ken Allen, Mark Williams, Ken Achiron, and Brian Meeker

Can your athletes' scores improve just through close attention to routine construction?

"Why was my guy's score so low?"

"How'd that other guy score higher? My guy's routine was harder!"

We've all heard comments like these, but how much of the problem might be related to the construction of routines? Does your gymnast have enough A parts? Does he complete skills in the manner required to receive the credit you hope for? Does he clearly and without question fulfill all special requirements? Or does the routine construction depend on gray areas and hoped-for interpretations by judges?

We picked the brains of an excellent panel of international judges, and in this article we provide their perspectives on routine construction. The main question each of them answered was, "As you judge around the world, what are the most common errors you find in routine construction that needlessly cost gymnasts points?" With a very important international season coming up, can you find any areas in which your gymnasts might achieve higher scores simply through routine construction?

FLOOR EXERCISE, Mike Cook

We have found the following routine construction problems to be prevalent at a variety of international competitions:

1. Not having enough A parts

Not having enough A parts in a routine is usually due to not understanding what is considered an A, and what is considered a part of no value. The following skills are considered A parts: Roundoff, back handspring, front handspring, splits, pirouette, scale, jump turn to prone fall, circle or flair.

The following skills are parts of no value. There is no deduction for performing these skills, but they do not count as A parts: prone fall, 1/4 pirouette, back extension roll, forward roll, chassé, cartwheel.



2. Not completing Russian wendeswings

Russian wendeswings on floor are counted very similar to the way they are counted on pommel horse. We start counting when the gymnast has his feet together in front support, and stop counting when a gymnast is no longer in front support. Some gymnasts will start from prone and will reach forward with the left hand (clockwise circles) to initiate the Russian, and therefore not achieve a front support until 90 to 180 degrees away from where the gymnast was in the prone position.

3. Not having enough bonus due to the combined acrobatic series rule

The problem with the combined acrobatic series rule comes more from gymnasts not taking advantage of the rule, rather than gymnasts performing too many combined acrobatic series and violating the rule.

The wording of the rule in the Code is confusing, but the examples in the 12/16/2000 Q&A Document (available at ngja.org) can help one understand the rule. Here is how I like to explain the rule:

An acrobatic series is any two or more directly connected saltos.

There are 2 types of directly combined acrobatic series: Type I and Type II.

Type I combined acrobatic series consists of only 2 saltos, one of which must be a natural D or higher value. A gymnast can do as many Type I series as he wants. There is no limit, EVEN IF A GYMNAST HAS PERFORMED TWO OF THE TYPE II SERIES.

Type II combined acrobatic series is any combined acrobatic series other than a Type I series. A gymnast can only do 2 Type II series in a routine. If a gymnast performs a third Type II series, the series just receives its natural value, with no value raising.

Some examples of Type I series include:

- Whip back, back 5/2 twist
- Whip back, Arabian double front
- Back 5/2 twist, punch front
- Front layout, front 2/1 twist
- Front 2/1 twist, front tuck
- Front layout, double front

NOTE: Current NGJA PowerPoint presentation shows a variety of examples of acrobatic series and their corresponding values. See: www.ngja.org

POMMEL HORSE, Mark Sherman

1. Quirky Russian Rules:

When falling off during a Russian, the Russian will not get credit no matter how much is completed.

A gymnast cannot repeat a dismount on any event. Therefore, he cannot attempt a Russian dismount if it was already attempted. No credit and no dismount.



The last 180 degrees of the Russian dismount is a Wende and is not included when determining the number of degrees. For example, from a Magyar finishing in a back loop, what appears to be a triple Russian dismount, is actually a 900 degree Russian since the last 180 degrees is the Wende. This would be a "C" dismount.

If the Wu starts in Cross Support, it finishes in Cross Support facing out (back loop position). Start counting the connected Russian from this position. A simple stockli to the saddle will not count as part of the Russian.

2. Connections

When connecting a Sivado to Russian, a gymnast must not take more than 3 hand placements prior to the Russian. All connections into and out of 3/3 travel must have 3 or less hand placements to get a connection.

3. "A" Parts

Count A parts. We have found a number of international gymnasts from various countries who are still short 1 or 2 skills. Not all international judges count A parts, but why take the chance?

RINGS, Ken Allen

International judges often have a picture in their minds of the performance criteria for various strength elements, i.e. special requirements #3 and #4 on rings. While this is not a "construction" issue per se, I believe the criteria are important enough to reiterate as coaches and athletes from all countries construct their exercises.

1. Swing to strength and strength with swing:

- When performing skills in the special requirement #3, swing to strength, the swing aspect should be as totally free of any evidence of strength as possible. In addition, the final position should be arrived at as abruptly as possible. Evidence of the use of strength in place of swing might include how wide the arms are during certain skills as well as how much evidence of "slowing down" there is prior to the final position.
- When performing skills in the special requirement #4, strength and hold elements, there should be no evidence of swing during movements (slow) to holds or evidence of movement of any sort while holding any position.

2. Other performance reminders:

- Be aware that false grips in any hold position are deducted.
- For any position in which the body should be straight, there should be no arch or pike.
- ALL hold parts need to be held a MINIMUM of two seconds regardless of what the rules say.
- A hold part, by definition, should be held absolutely still.
- A press is a strength part that should move slowly and with an even rhythm (tempo) to a solid handstand. Changes in rhythm, deep arm bends in a bent arm/straight body press, leaning against the straps are all signs of "weakness" that bring deductions.

3. Routine construction reminders:

- The coach should never leave his athlete with "swing" after lifting him to the rings. This would bring a deduction of 0.2.
- A slow inlocate and a "swing" inlocate are in two different boxes and, therefore, each receives credit as an A part, i.e. two A parts.
- A dislocate is an A part and it doesn't matter if it is a pike/open dislocate from an inverted hang or a "giant" dislocate. No matter how they are performed or how many are done, only one A part will be credited.
- As a follow through to the previous point, suppose an athlete does a pike/open dislocate from an inverted hang to a "giant" dislocate whereby the shoulders reach ring height to a "giant" dislocate (perhaps an attempt at a felge through handstand) that reaches less than 45 deg. above horizontal to a felge to a handstand. That athlete receives an A part for the first dislocate, a 0.2 deduction for repeating a skill three times consecutively, and a C part for the felge to handstand.



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- The only time a straddled press may be used is from a straddled L position. Otherwise, there would be a 0.2 deduction for a prohibited element and there would be no credit for the press.
- A felge to a handstand, whether performed from a dislocate or a handstand (giant) is the same skill, i.e. in the same box, and cannot be repeated for value.
- An extended pause in a straight or bent inverted hang could bring up to a 0.2 deduction and is considered poor construction.
- A back uprise to a straddled L is a B part. Moving to a regular L position will bring a 0.2 deduction for a half intermediate swing.

VAULT, Mark Williams

For many gymnasts from all over the world, routine construction in vaulting really means the development of vaults with higher start values. Higher difficulty in vaulting, however, must be accomplished in a manner that minimizes execution deductions. Following are some of the most common deductions we see internationally in vaulting.

1. Pre-flight deductions

Many gymnasts have done a good job of cleaning up the pre-flight on handspring vaults. Although round off vaults do not typically have pre-flight deductions, internationally gymnasts must continue to work on reducing deductions on these popular vaults.



2. Landing deductions

Landings are still a source of major deductions for many gymnasts from all countries. Emphasizing landings at the junior level should lead to improvement within a few years at the senior level. Further, international gymnasts should routinely practice landings on hard mats. Pits serve a valuable purpose in vaulting, but practicing landings is not one of those purposes, and the gymnast who practices landings primarily in a pit will be at a disadvantage in competition.

PARALLEL BARS, Ken Achiron

1. General routine construction reminders

- Fulfill each element group.
- Count the skills. Some routines do not have 10 parts or enough A parts.
- Write out the routine. Make sure everything is accounted for.

2. Specific construction and performance issues

- Why are some skills not given credit? Repeated Skills don't count, so know when two skills are in one box. Examples:
 - Back uprise handstand or with 1/2 turn.

- Diamidov and Diamidov 5/4 to one rail both in the same box.
- Stutz to handstand on 2 rails and Stutz to handstand, one rail, mixed grip facing crossways.

- Meet the definition of the skill, otherwise it may not be recognized.
 - For example, Giant to Handstand, and attempted Wells with insufficient inlocation will both be the same giant.

- Do NOT bounce on the rails on straddle skills!

- Eliminate empty swings, layaways.
 - An empty swing (one side of the pendulum) = 0.2 deduction. For example, front uprise, swing back, fwd stutzkehre.
 - An intermediate swing (two successive empty swings) = 0.3 deduction. For example, front uprise, swing back, swing fwd, handstand.
 - Layaways: back swings in support or in upper arm that reverse direction and swing down in or to a lower hang or support position (also if accompanied by a grip change). For example, glide kip to support and swing down to a Giant or Moy to support.

- Do not plan more than 3 holds of 1 sec. or more.
 - Each Press will have a hold at the start and the end.
 - 2 presses = 4 holds (deduct 0.2).
 - Each handstand held for 1 second or more is considered a hold part.

- Prohibited Elements are skills you may not use, deducted 0.2 each time. They include:
 - Strength or hold skills not listed in the difficulty tables.
 - Salts and dismounts in side hang on 1 bar.
 - Pre-elements prior to the first skill (front salto onto bars, jump to forward roll before first skill).
 - Other skills added to the list by FIG (jump to upper arm hang and swing forward to piked inverted position, then swing rearward to backuprise handstand; deduct 0.2).
 - Note: A forward roll from support or handstand, prior to skills such as back uprise handstand is not valued but is not a prohibited element and is not deducted.

- A typical Straddling occurs when the gymnast starts in a legs together position and then straddles as he completes the skill.
 - Presses to handstand that start with the legs together must finish with the legs together, otherwise deduct 0.2 for atypical straddling (includes glide stoop to handstand).



- Poor transitions equal guaranteed deductions.
 - Pauses during forward rolls or lowering to upper arms from the handstand will be deducted. These transitions must move continuously.

- Connection Bonus Rules for Parallel Bars:
 - Bonus for connection only when skills follow in same direction.
 - No pause is allowed between skills to receive connection bonus.
 - Pauses of less than one second may prevent connection bonus but do not rise to the level of an A part between.
 - Some skills can connect either forward or backward.

3. Achiron's Rules for Success:

- Every competition, every routine is important.
- Don't expect a benefit of the doubt.
- If you need help from the judges to win, you won't.

4. Achiron's Corollaries:

- If you want to win, don't depend on the judges to do it for you.
- Prepare your routine as though the panel will be very critical.
- Choose skills you can do, have no more than 3 holds, but hold the required handstands, and win it yourself.

HORIZONTAL BAR, Brian Meeker



After reviewing notes and reports from various international competitions, the following seem to be common errors or problems associated with routine construction on horizontal bar.

1. Missing special requirements

- Occasionally, this is a release or flight element. Some coaches know they are missing it, but choose to leave the requirement out because the gymnast can't fulfill the element group without a significant deduction.
- Remember that quast skills are long hang elements. Know which skills are in which element groups.
- Flight element backup. It is a good idea for a gymnast to have a "backup" flight element in case they miss their primary release. A gymnast may miss a Kovacs, then remount and miss it again. By this point he is 1.0 off for falls and then too gun-shy to try a third attempt, thus incurring a further 0.2 deduction for missing the requirement. It would not take a good gymnast more than one afternoon to learn another "easy" release that he could perform consistently. In many cases he could save 0.7 if he simply did an easy backup release.
- In some cases, a gymnast will make a mistake on a jam or Takamoto, such that neither can be credited as an in-bar element.
- Occasionally, a gymnast may attempt to perform a stalder for the in-bar requirement, but will do a toe on toe off through an execution error, in which case the in-bar element group is not fulfilled.

2. Body position

- Many gymnasts think they have all of the requirements filled only to find out their double layout is actually a double pike. Body position affects many dismounts, so work toward the Code definition of the stretched position to insure credit is given.
- Body position also affects the value given to many flight skills. Again, work toward the correct position or start values may be lower than anticipated.

3. High Bar mounts

- This is as much a technical deduction as a construction deduction, but it is one of my pet peeves. The Code states that a stem is given an A value if it rises 45 degrees above the bar. This is the minimum requirement to get an A move, but still receives at least a 0.2 deduction.
- If the gymnast wants the A move with no deduction for a stem, he needs to take it to a handstand. It is not hard, but many do not focus on this.

4. Construction recommendation

- With the devaluation of the Zou Li Min, many gymnasts gravitated to the in-bar elements with turns to various grips to achieve high start values. Some of these skills can incur deductions beyond their values, and they must be done without pause or hesitation to receive credit.
- The best international routines in the future will likely include release sequences to achieve high start values, and coaches and gymnasts may wish to start focusing on these. When done well, there is little room for deduction, which is not the case on most in-bar skills and connections, and some gymnasts have received a full point of bonus for release sequences.

The last item is one that will not cost your gymnast any points, unless he does not remount in time. But this is seen frequently by judges on pommel horse, parallel bars, horizontal bar, and occasionally on rings. When a gymnast falls, he will chalk up and talk to the coach for a few seconds. In my experience, the majority of gymnasts will then raise their arms to the head judge, as if they need permission to remount. This is not necessary and, if the gymnast is close to the 30 second time limit, may risk the termination of the routine at that point.

So, these are the thoughts of some of the guys who judge the gymnasts on a regular basis. We sit in the chair, record the routines and the deductions, and discover patterns along the way. Once a judge finds a pattern of construction errors or deductions, the judge tends to look for that pattern to be repeated and will not miss it if it occurs. The most frustrating pattern is the one in which gymnasts give up points needlessly. Some international coaches and gymnasts may find a tip or two in this article that will help them score higher with little or no effort. For others, the points in this article may just serve as reminders of what judges are looking for. ■

COURTNEY McCool

ATHLETE FOCUS



by Luan Peszek

Courtney McCool is 15 years old and making a big name for herself in gymnastics circles these days. Courtney finished second all-around at the 2003 U.S. Championships in the junior division and most recently earned an international assignment. At the end of November, Courtney and a few U.S. teammates traveled to Marseille, France, for the Masillia Gym Cup where she finished third all-around, first on beam and fourth on vault among many World Championships competitors. McCool finished just behind Romania's Andrea Munteanu and Monica Rosu.

"It was so awesome," said Courtney. "It was a great experience. I've never

competed with gymnasts from so many different countries before."

When asked about the best part of the trip, Courtney said, "looking up at the screen and seeing my name in first place for beam."

This was Courtney's second international trip. She also traveled to Santo Domingo earlier in 2003 for the Pan American Games where she helped her team win the gold medal and she won the silver medal on vault.

Courtney lives in Lee's Summit, Mo., and trains at Great American Gymnastics Express with her coaches Al Fong and



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Armine Barutyan Fong. She's a tenth grade student at Lee's Summit North High School and says math is her favorite subject.

Courtney trains six hours per day Monday-Friday and four hours on Saturday. Her parents are Mike and Linda and she has an older brother Michael and a younger sister Morgan. Her goal is to make the Olympic Games team and win a medal! ■

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