

I Was a Gymnast, So Now I Can Coach - RIGHT?



By Claudia Kretschner, USA Gymnastics PDCP Instructor

I was a gymnast, so that must mean that I can teach gymnastics!! I thought so, and my employer agreed. My first job coaching was for the local Recreation Department. One strip mat, one hour and 30 hyperactive children later I was a full-fledged coach and needless to say learning lessons in spontaneous creativity. One realizes rather quickly that standing in one line and doing forward rolls simply wouldn't work! A few years later, my husband and I opened our own gym. I expanded from a strip mat to "luxury." We had a whole floor, 1 set of bars, 1 vault and 2 beams! My husband and I taught every class and started a team. We were hungry for knowledge. We quickly signed up for National Congress and loved it but we needed more hands on experience. We needed to see quality coaching in action. We spent a lot of time going to visit other gyms, and we watched top level coaches and gymnasts. We would then go back to our gym and try the same methods these coaches used with their elites on our beginner recreational kids. That didn't work so well, but we were motivated to have a "good" program. Luckily for us there was not a lot of competition because we learned everything the HARD way.



The explosion of the popularity of gymnastics has brought competition. There are new gyms popping up every day. Competition has driven our sport to a whole new level, and now club owners and coaches must have knowledge and professionalism in order to be successful. USA Gymnastics has met this need by developing a great course for beginning coaches. The new PDCP (Professional Development Certification Program) was written by the National Staff. Now club owners have the opportunity to train and nationally certify their staff right in their own state. One of the determining factors for success in this sport is a continued desire for learning and expertise. The PDCP is a large part of this equation.

What is the PDCP Course?

The program focuses on the beginning levels of the Junior Olympic Program. This is the most important stage in the full development of an athlete. Solid basics are vital to the physical longevity and skill proficiency of the athlete. It is so much easier to learn it right at the start rather than trying to fix it up later.

This program is designed for your recreational through Level 4 staff. However, I found it extremely beneficial for all levels in my program.

This is a fantastic way for you to not only improve the level of gymnastics in your program, but the professionalism of your entire club. Each participant attending this course becomes certified by USA Gymnastics.

What is covered in the PDCP course?

The Professional Development Certification Program is divided into eight parts:

- Vault
- Bars
- Beam
- Tumbling
- Spotting
- Dance
- Coaching 101
- Sports science
- Psychology

Event training (Vault, Bars, Beam & Tumbling) will take you beyond the skills of the Level 1-4 program. Instructors will learn a variety of drills, stations and conditioning for each of the Level 1-4 skills. It will give you a basic philosophy for each event and help you with the practicalities of teaching.

The Spotting Clinic covers basic spotting on all events. It is tailored to meet the needs of the participants, with real "hands on" spotting.

Dance – Don't get intimidated! This class is a blast! This class will help anyone to teach dance.

Coaching 101 will provide you with invaluable information that every instructor, coach or club owner requires. Coaching 101 teaches you how to create lesson plans, and basic problem solving solutions. This portion is crucial for learning how to improve relations between employee and employer, parents, gymnasts and co-workers. Most of all, it helps you to become a professional at your profession!

Sports Science – developed by Bill Sands, this part of the course teaches coaching theory and basic sports science. e.g. "Train smarter, not harder."

Psychology – developed by Allison Arnold. "Training the mind is like training the body." This course will teach you fun drills to tighten the mind just like we teach drills to tighten the body.

Who should take this course?

Plain and simply, anyone and everyone who teaches gymnastics! In my course I've taught a full range of people, from pre-school instructors, cheer instructors, rec instructors, pre-team coaches, to team coaches and elite coaches. Everyone has greatly enjoyed and benefited from this course.



Why is this course different from other courses?

This course is up close and personal. It is typically held in a gym setting with live demonstrators. The course participants are able to see first hand how set up stations and drills, while the instructor is better able to tailor the course to the needs and levels of the participants. After completing this course you will have a full background for teaching, lesson planning, and have a better understanding of all areas of gymnastics.



What are the benefits?

Motivation, increased knowledge, new ideas. You are now a professional. Think about where you do business, what doctors, and



lawyers you trust. Do you feel more comfortable working with professionals in their field? Of course! Parents will feel more comfortable leaving their children in the care of professionals. The two days of training are worth it! An added bonus for club owners: you can't beat being able to advertise – "Nationally Certified Staff."

How do I find out about a course near me?

Go to the USA Gymnastics website usa-gymnastics.org. There is a list of state instructors and courses offered. If you do not see a course offered in your state, contact your state instructor. It's even possible to arrange a course in your very own gym!



The next course scheduled is Oct. 2-3 in North Tonawanda, New York, and given by Pete LaChance. Call (845)534-9793 to register. If you'd like to host a PDCP course in your area, check out the PDCP instructor list on the website at <http://www.usa-gymnastics.org/safety-and-education/w-pdcpinstructorlist.html>

and simply contact an instructor to host a course in your gym!