

OLYMPIC GOLD 2008:

10 WAYS TO PREPARE YOUR GYM FOR THE OLYMPICS

By Dr. Robyn J.A. Silverman

It's an Olympic year and that could mean very good things for gyms all over. That is, if we're prepared. More exposure can mean more students, parents, and interest in your program.

Are you ready? Dr. Robyn gives us some tips on how to plan ahead so we're not left behind.

During the 1984 Olympics, I didn't sit idly while Mary Lou Retton flipped her way into our hearts. I was up-and-at-'em in my parent's bedroom jumping around and doing my own "Olympic best." As a child, there are few things as exciting as watching your hero perform and succeed. Gymnastics class was especially interesting to me that year.

We all know that with the Olympics comes increased interest in gymnastics. More children ask their parents if they can take classes and more parents enter our gyms asking when their children can enroll.

So what should you do to get ready for the Olympic "Peek" at your gym? Be sure to (1) prepare your gym; (2) educate your clients; and (3) prepare for longevity.

Prepare your gym:

The first impression is quickly made and virtually irreversible. Within the first three seconds that a new prospect walks into

your gym it's evaluated from front to back and top to bottom. People appraise the visual components of your gym in a glance. They observe your staff, your equipment, your decorations, your students and any problem areas—dead plants, peeling paint, and unprofessional behavior. Within only three seconds, they've created an indelible impression that may comfort some and repel others.

While some of your clients have been with you for some time, they, too, may make new first impressions when you make a change. While getting your gym ready for the Olympic rush, how will you make the best impression on your prospects and current clients?

Follow these steps:

Add staff: An increase in students can mean a change in your teacher-to-student ratio. When classes get bigger without any adjustment in number of staff, safety can be compromised. In addition, more children may be left standing in line waiting for

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their turns and more parents, especially those who've been with your gym for a long time, may feel shafted or dissatisfied. Refresh your paint: This is such an easy way to make your gym look fresh and new. When people are looking ahead, you don't want to appear like you're behind the times. As you've seen in my previous articles (i.e. Raising the Bar: Transforming Your Gym into a Personal Development Center, January 2007), it takes seconds for a parent to judge how they feel about your gym. Appearance is critical. They may think, "If their gym looks old and dingy, their equipment might be as well."

Put up your flags: Putting up the Olympic flag as well as the flag of your country shows your patriotism and excitement for this world event. They are the most meaningful decorations you will ever put on your walls. You may even choose to put up several flags honoring competing teams from around the world. The Olympics is a momentous series of events where much of the world competes—such an occasion deserves a grand salute.

Mount up bulletin boards: Hands-On-Training (H.O.T.) teacher, Sandi Stevens McGee will be putting up 2 bulletin boards. One that says, "Here are our Olympians" with information on the Olympic gymnasts, events, and the Beijing "mascots" and one that says, "How you are an Olympian?" which will reflect the character education program that she teaches at her multi-site gyms. We must teach children that they don't have to be an Olympian to be an Olympian in life. Sandi says,

"Mounting projects from our Powerful Words program onto the bulletin boards will be a visual reminder to the students and parents that we are a lot more than just a place children learn gymnastics."

Put up a banner: What describes your feelings about the Olympics, gymnastics, and your gym? Put it up on your walls! Do you want messages about perseverance, vision, and focus? Would you like banners featuring famous quotes from Olympic athletes? Think about your core values and the values of your gym and post banners accordingly. For more information about banners, please contact me directly and I'd be happy to help you.

Tack up patriotic stars: Cut out and post up stars in red, white and blue. These stars can be used as back drops for Olympic athlete information or like frames around student pictures and

names! Stars show a patriotic spirit and can also be used to drive attention towards specific information at your gym.

Educate your clients:

Gymnastics has been part of the Olympics since 1896, but that doesn't mean that your students, families, or staff know everything they need to know about them. Given that each time the Olympics comes around, many of the athletes change, coaches are added, and the Olympic host is altered, there is a lot of new aspects to the games.

As you know, the 2008 Olympics is particularly interesting (and likely confusing) because of the major overhaul that took place on the scoring procedure in 2006. Stemming from the judging controversy in Athens (2004), the perfect 10 is a thing of the past and 15.9s and 16.2s have taken the place of more familiar scores. That means that in order for everyone to understand the Olympics and for you to take advantage of the hype—"you got a lot of 'splaining to do!"

Keep these things in mind when educating your clients about the Olympics:

Do your research: What's going on at the Olympics this year? Who will be representing the United States? When will the events take place? Become fluent in the new scoring system if you are not already and be prepared to answer people's questions when they tell you "they don't get it." You can't create the hype if you don't know what's happening.

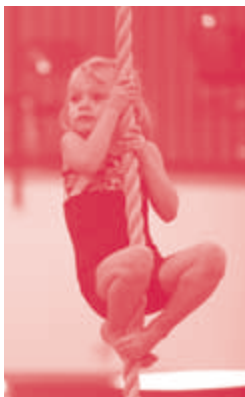
Educate the parents: I'm surprised I didn't crack open my head while I ran from my brother's room, through the hallway, and into my parents' bedroom to do a round-off/backhand-spring/back-tuck on their yellow carpet during Olympic trials week in '84. We need to talk to parents about what skills are appropriate or inappropriate to do outside of the gym. The Olympics bring the gymnastics right inside our homes. People are cheering. It's exciting! And of course, it's only logical that children will try to emulate their heroes. To head off any unnecessary trips to the hospital, talk to parents and children about "the rules."

Teach the children about the Olympics: Aside from educating your students about safety at home, teach them about how the Olympics work. How do they score the athletes? Why are the

Olympics so important and exciting for the countries involved? What does my country's team have to do with me? When children understand how the Olympics work, they'll be more excited about them and more excited about their sport.

Prepare for Longevity:

Of course, the Olympic hype won't last forever. Once the Summer Olympics is over and we go back to "business as usual" you'll need to fall back on great curriculum, terrific programming, and strong staff to draw in new clients and retain your veterans. Are they up to par? Are you keeping things fresh? Are you in tune with what parents want for their children?



It's important to take note of the aspects of your gym that need to be improved as well as those that should be highlighted. The Olympics are a wonderful time to draw in more people—now is the time to make sure that your gym will have staying power once the Olympic torch of 2008 is extinguished.

Be sure to put this 10th step into practice:

Teach that gymnastics is more than just the Olympics: If you make your gym all about the Olympics, you're

shortchanging yourself. We all know that there are a lot more children who want to learn gymnastics than there are children who will become Olympian gymnasts. Talk to your students about the other benefits and goals of gymnastics such as, to get stronger, fitter, healthier, or more flexible. These goals have longevity. In addition, talk to parents about the social and character-based benefits of gymnastics as well. Those of you who are using a character education program at your schools will benefit greatly by showing how you not only help children become great gymnasts but also great leaders and citizens. These lessons have staying power!

The Summer Olympics only come around every four years. Make the most of it! But remember; you offer so much more than just one path. Students who train at your gym can become anything they want to be—whether it's an up and coming U.S. Olympian or an Olympian in life. Send that message and your clients will surely flip over it. ✖

TEACHING CHILDREN THE QUALITIES OF AN OLYMPIAN

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Do your students want to be just like one of the gymnasts they see on TV? Yes, they are great athletes...but what makes them that way? This is where character education can take a front seat in preparing for and riding the Olympic wave. Here is just a brief sampling of the discussions our Powerful Words member gyms will be having at their academies:

Perseverance: How do your students' favorite gymnasts show perseverance in every routine and every practice? How do your students show the same kind of perseverance in their own lives?

Discipline: What kind of discipline does it take to achieve a goal like being a member of the Olympic team? Where do you show discipline in your life?

Responsibility: What do you think are the responsibilities of an Olympic hopeful? What kinds of responsibilities must you meet on your quest to be your best?

Determination: Why do you think being determined is so important on our quest to reach our goals? When have you felt determined?

The Olympics can be a great stepping stone to talk about your gym's values and well as what it takes to be the best in any area of life. ✖

Dr Robyn J.A. Silverman is an award-winning Child and Adolescent Development Specialist who has worked with after school programming across the world for over 8 years. She has developed the POWERful Words Character Toolkit, a systemized, easy-to-use, age-appropriate character education program for children ages 3 and up. The Toolkit is currently being used in over 500 large and small gymnastics and martial arts academies worldwide. For information on implementing the POWERful Words Character Toolkit in your academy or to speak with Dr. Robyn about coaching, teleseminars, or speaking engagements, please call (877) 769-3799, visit <http://www.AllStarCharacter.com>, <http://www.PowerMoment.com>, or <http://www.PowerfulWordsBlog.com>