



As President of USA Gymnastics, I hear stories on a daily basis about what is happening in the sport. Recently I received a heart-warming story about three sisters – triplets – that have benefitted from participation in the sport. It really hit home for me, since I have 4-year-old triplet daughters of my own who participate in gymnastics classes.

The following story truly fits our slogan, Begin Here. Go Anywhere. I wanted to share it with you to reinforce the enormous impact you can have on children.

Seven years ago, I gave birth to triplet girls. I couldn't be happier! However, they were born at 30 weeks, which is early, even for triplets. Of course there were many problems. Two of my daughters spent a month in the neonatal unit at the hospital, and my other daughter spent three months there, but they all finally made it home. They were released on oxygen and apnea monitors that they used for a year. In that year we endured brain surgery, heart surgery, eye surgery, and countless hours at physical, occupational, and developmental therapy just to name a few. We remained as positive as we could. Two of my daughters have been diagnosed with a mild cerebral palsy, both wearing leg braces for several years. One of my daughters still wears a brace at night to this day and has had surgery to lengthen her Achilles tendon as she grows due to problems resulting from her brain surgery.

When the girls turned 3 years old, they were still in therapy. Fortunately, this is when I met Cindy Gregg (known as Mrs. Cindy to the girls), whose gym was in the same building as our therapy sessions. I signed the girls up for gymnastics classes and they have been with Lafayette Area Gymnastics Club in Lafayette, Ind., and with Mrs. Cindy ever since. The girls even managed to join the team two years ago and are still competing! Yes, competing, something I never imagined they would ever do. Mrs. Cindy and I have a bet that if my daughter Mia does a round off back-handspring I owe her a million dollars. We also have placed similar bets for climbing the rope, climbing the rope with no legs, etc. all of which I have lost. When we visit their doctors, they are simply amazed at the girls' progress! We are also involved in a triplet study at the hospital where they were born and results indicate that they are well beyond what anyone had ever hoped.



I feel I owe much of their success to gymnastics. The stretching, and strengthening exercises that they perform have allowed them to surpass every goal I have ever set for them in my own mind. As parents we see our three girls that have acquired a confidence that they may otherwise have been denied because they could have been less fortunate than others physically. I can assure you that they would not be where they are today if not for gymnastics classes. We are truly blessed. I have encouraged everyone I have met in therapy to take a chance like we did. They will be happy with the outcome in every aspect of their child's development.

*Sincerely,
Kristi and Joe Patton and Nina, Mia, and Sophia*

I share the same feelings as the Patton's. Every day I have the joy of watching my three daughters grow with confidence in their physical skills. And while the furniture in our home has taken the brunt of most of their enthusiasm, in the long run, I know it is a small price to pay for the great fitness foundation they are building.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Dallas at the Visa Championships and National Congress, where we will celebrate the greatness of this sport.

See you in the gym.

Steve Penny
President/CEO