



How to Start an Acrobatic Gymnastics Program in Your Gym

What

is Acrobatic Gymnastics?



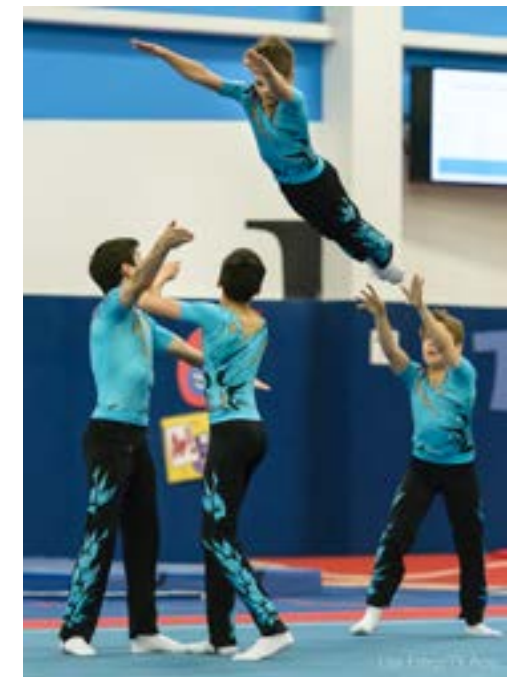
To paint a visual image of Acrobatic Gymnastics, or acro as it is commonly called, you could say it is a combination of artistic gymnastics, pairs figure skating, and Cirque du Soleil acrobatics and choreography. The competitors tell a story with their performances, while capturing the audience's attention with thrilling dynamic and graceful balance skills.

To expand on that visual description, acro is a partner sport. Partners in pairs or groups of three or four perform acrobatic skills like balance holds, hand balancing, pyramids, toss and catches. Routines also include tumbling elements and are set to music with unique choreography and synchronization among partners.

The elite competitors in the sport, like most sports, are simply amazing to watch. The beauty and grace, coupled with skills that seem to defy gravity, leave the audience wanting more. The discipline certainly provides tremendous opportunities, fun, and physical activity for the participants. The partner aspect of acro makes it an even more interesting gymnastics discipline, promoting teamwork and cooperation along with physical fitness.

Another exciting development is the introduction of Acrobatics and Tumbling at the collegiate level. This sport is governed by the National Collegiate

Acrobatics & Tumbling Association, whose mission is to bring the sport of Acrobatics and Tumbling through NCAA emerging sport status to become a fully sanctioned NCAA championship sport. This provides another avenue for competitive gymnasts to continue competing and receive scholarships after graduating from high school.



Who

is Acrobatic Gymnastics for?

Acrobatic Gymnastics is fun for athletes of any age and athletic ability. Athletes of varying heights, weights, and body types can participate in acrobatic gymnastics. Smaller, more flexible athletes are needed as tops, while taller and stronger athletes are ideal for base positions.

Since so many athletes can participate in acro, it can be a great addition to a gymnastics club, dance studio, or recreational program. Athletes with gymnastics, tumbling, and dance backgrounds find it easy to transition into acro since many of the basic body positions and skills apply.

"Acrobatic Gymnastics has provided athletes of Acro Explosion the opportunity to see that hard work and determination does pay off. The love the athletes have for this sport allows them to inspire other kids in the community to get involved and follow their dreams. Because dreams do come true, it just takes hard work and determination.

Acrobatic Gymnastics has provided Acro Explosion athletes the opportunity to travel, meeting people from all around the world, giving these athletes exposure to other cultures, languages, and lifestyles. Acrobatic Gymnastics has provided Acro Explosion athletes the ability to build relationships and develop life time friendships at the same time gaining self-confidence through these experiences. Acrobatic Gymnastics has provided education on fitness, respect for others, setting and obtaining goals, and self-discipline.

Acrobatic Gymnastics gives children of all shapes, sizes and skill levels an opportunity to compete and be a part of a team. There is a place on our team for every child that walks through the gym door. At Ronda's Dance Tumble Cheer Center one of our main goals is promoting physically active children. Acrobatic Gymnastics not only does that but it also builds self-esteem and self-confidence in our young athletes and gives them the opportunities to experience and broaden their perspectives, helping to produce well-rounded and mature individuals."

- **Ronda Francis**

Owner and head coach of Acro Explosion / Ronda's Dance*Tumble*Cheer Center in Blue Springs, MO



Why participate in acro?

Here are some of the wonderful benefits that can be derived from an acro program at your club:

- Quick and inexpensive to add an additional program to your gym
- Unique advertising and marketing for your gym
- Creates new excitement among parents, athletes and staff
- Attracts new athletes
- Retains current athletes
- Provides more choices for students
- Offers more competitive outlets
- Captures additional revenue
- Provides fun activities for recreational classes
- Introduces additional opportunities for college-bound gymnasts



"Acrobatic Gymnastics is a beautiful sport that combines strength, flexibility, tumbling, dance, and artistic gymnastics. All major gymnastics clubs in the United States should offer acrobatics as part of their program. Acrobatic Gymnastics is a unique sport that offers athletes of various ages with different body types and abilities the opportunity to use their gymnastics skills and be successful in a competitive arena. The physical demands of acrobatics are less strenuous than that of artistic gymnastics, therefore allowing athletes more years of participation. As a gymnastics club owner, this program appeals to a broader population and allows us to keep athletes in the gym that might ordinarily drop from gymnastics due to physical maturity, injuries, or time restraints. There are unlimited benefits to having Acrobatic Gymnastics in your club!"

- Yevgeny Marchenko
WOGA Gymnastics co-owner
World Champion, European Champion, World Cup Winner in Acrobatics Gymnastics-Mixed Pair
Coach of Carly Patterson

Various opportunities and benefits are available to athletes through participation in acrobatic gymnastics, such as the following:

- Physical fitness - especially in the areas of strength, flexibility, agility, balance
- Life skills - particularly teamwork, communication and trust among partners, responsibility, and friendship
- Variety - gymnasts can do acro in addition to current disciplines
- Safety - partners assist athletes to safe landings with less wear and tear on the body
- Accomplishment of goals - fewer age limitations which leads to a wider window of opportunity to accomplish goals and remain competitive in the sport
- Outlet for Artistic Expression - by combining the love of gymnastics with the love of dance
- Continued Participation in Gymnastics - acro is perfect for gymnasts who enjoy tumbling and floor exercise, but may not prefer other apparatus such as beam or bars



How

to start an acro program?



Equipment: Minimal equipment is needed for an acro program. The pre-team program and lower competitive levels can be performed on panel mats or carpet bonded foam. Higher levels require a spring floor. Other helpful equipment includes a CD player, stop watch, and selection of music.

As the athletes progress, pedestals [or blocks], an overhead spotting belt, and various mats are helpful with drills, learning new skills, and conditioning.

Class Structure: A typical session may run 12-14 weeks, but could be tailored to meet the needs of your program. Beginner classes may meet once a week for 1 to 1½ hours. Athletes may also be required to participate in a tumbling class at another time during the week.

It often works best to have two coaches with 6 to 8 pairs or groups of athletes, or one coach could work with 4 to 5 pairs/groups.

The first few weeks of the session are focused on conditioning, individual element work, and partnering athletes. Once the partnerships are formed, more time is spent developing pair/group skills. Athletes in a pre-team program may work toward a performance at the conclusion of the session.

Partnering Athletes: When partnering athletes, consider the following:

- Size
- Weight
- Strength
- Personality and chemistry
- Similar goals and ambition

Athletes may be grouped into pairs or trios, based on the numbers in the class. Pairs can be all girls, all boys or a mixture, trios are all girls and groups of four are all boys. An athlete may participate in both a pair and a group if desired.

Learning the Skills/Coaching: The materials referenced below provide a wealth of information to help get you started. The Pre-Team program includes detailed lesson plans, skill descriptions, and pictures. Online videos are available to help coaches learn technique for Levels 2-6 skills. Another tremendous resource is the A200: Acro Basics course which is offered online through USA Gymnastics University. Each region within the Acrobatics Program also conducts a Regional Athlete Clinic during the winter [December - February]. The regional clinics also provide terrific coaches education and training opportunities for athletes at all levels.

Where

to get more information?



The Pre-Team program provides a recreational program introducing basic acro skills and positions. Clubs can utilize this program for recreational classes or a more formal pre-team. At the end of a session, athletes may perform for parents or the club could host an intra-squad meet. The Pre-Team program has three levels which build upon each other and progress directly into the JO Program, which starts at Level 1. All of the information for the JO program is contained in the JO Code of Points and the Acrobatic Gymnastics Rules and Policies.

Another avenue for involvement is the Competitive Blocks Program, which is a coordinated program used to promote athlete participation within the Acrobatic Gymnastics discipline and develop skills within many gymnastics disciplines.

Reference Materials

- Pre team program - Provides an easy-to-use program to get acro started in your gym. www.usagym.org/pages/acro/pages/overview_preteam.html
- Competitive blocks program - Includes skills and exercise requirements for all levels of the blocks program. www.usagym.org/pages/acro/pages/overview_blocks.html
- JO Code of Points - Includes skills and exercise requirements for Levels 1-10. www.usagym.org/pages/acro/pages/jo_codeofpoints.html

- Coaches Training videos - Videos of compulsory level routines for all categories and skill techniques www.usagym.org/pages/acro/video/jo_compulsory.html

Growth & Development Committee

Please contact a Growth and Development committee member to assist in getting you materials to start your program.

Region 1: Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Dylan Maurer dmninja@gmail.com

Region 3: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas

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Region 7: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia

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Acro Explosion
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Acrobatic Gymnastics of San Antonio
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Aerial Tumbling & Acro Gymnastics
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Aspire Kids Sports Center
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