USA Gymnastics is the national governing body for the sport in the United States. It gets this designation from the U.S. Olympic Committee and the International Gymnastics Federation. USA Gymnastics, headquartered in Indianapolis, Ind., sets the rules and policies that govern the sport of gymnastics. USA Gymnastics has many responsibilities, including selecting and training the U.S. Gymnastics Teams for the Olympics and World Championships; promoting and developing gymnastics on the grassroots and national levels; and serving as a resource center for members, clubs, fans and gymnasts throughout the United States. USA Gymnastics also provides continuing education resources for new and experienced coaches and instructors in the sport.

USA Gymnastics encompasses six disciplines: Women’s Gymnastics, Men’s Gymnastics, Trampoline and Tumbling, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Acrobatic Gymnastics and Group Gymnastics. Today, more than 120,000 athletes and professionals are members of USA Gymnastics.

More than 4,000 competitions and events are sanctioned annually throughout the USA. USA Gymnastics has more than 97,000 athletes registered to participate in the Junior Olympic and elite programs.

The chart above shows each discipline and how it progresses from beginner to elite level.

The ultimate goal in the sport is to become a USA National Gymnastics Team member. To become a national team member, a gymnast must first work his or her way through a series of qualifying meets. The preliminary meets range from USA Gymnastics-sanctioned competitions organized by private clubs to state, regional and national qualification meets. Each meet gives the athlete the opportunity to meet minimum qualification scores and/or placement requirements established by USA Gymnastics. Gymnasts meeting the requirements are then eligible to compete in the Visa Championships, USA Gymnastics’ national championships and the most prestigious and significant competition of the year.
USA Gymnastics has developed a website directed to parents that can be used as a resource. The website www.usagymclub.com includes a listing to all of the USA Gymnastics Member Clubs around the country, testimonials from some of the top individuals in our sport, Beams of Knowledge, and other important information for parents to know. We also have a section where you can ask questions.

NATIONAL GYMNASTICS DAY

Each year, USA Gymnastics celebrates National Gymnastics Day to raise exposure of our sport. Since 2001, gymnastics clubs across the country have raised more than $1.5 million for Children’s Miracle Network. This year, on September 22, 2012, gym clubs across the country will celebrate the sport on National Gymnastics Day as a show of strength and a fundraiser for Children’s Miracle Network. The monies raised are distributed to each gym club’s local Children’s Miracle Network hospital, which helps children around the country who are fighting illness.

GROUP GYMNASTICS

This is the Group Gymnastics team from Biron Gymnastics in Houston, Texas, at the International Sports and Cultural Festival in Ft. Worth, Texas. Biron Gymnastics, representing USA Gymnastics, was selected as a special performing group in the FIG Gala at the 2011 World Gymnaestrada in Lausanne, Switzerland. Internationally, Group Gymnastics is known as Gymnastics for All.

PARENT’S RESOURCE

USA Gymnastics has developed a website directed to parents that can be used as a resource. The website www.usagymclub.com includes a listing to all of the USA Gymnastics Member Clubs around the country, testimonials from some of the top individuals in our sport, Beams of Knowledge, and other important information for parents to know. We also have a section where you can ask questions.

BRIDGET SLOAN

2009 World All-Around Champion
Children in the United States are heavier and less active than ever. First Lady Michelle Obama has even initiated a campaign against childhood obesity called “Let’s Move” (www.letsmove.gov). They report that children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of seven hours per day using television, computers, cell phones, video games and other entertainment media. As school budgets become tighter, the first things to be eliminated are the arts programs, physical education and athletic programs.

The immediate, as well as life long, health consequences of obesity include heart disease, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, Type II diabetes and asthma, to name a few. Parents, physicians, and communities must work together to provide regular physical activity for our children, that can begin in early childhood, can be done by any child, and has enough action and variety to be fun. Gymnastics is the answer!

Gymnastics education can begin at an early age. Once your child is walking, a parent/toddler class is an excellent place
Gymnastics not only increases strength, grace and flexibility, but also encourages hard work, discipline and determination.

to start. Your child can comfortably learn skills that improve balance and coordination with you right next to him or her. Your child can enjoy being around other children, but with the one-on-one attention they need. Parents also learn skills they can use in developmental play at home.

As your child matures, brain growth is very rapid and new skills can be readily learned. In the preschool years, children continue to improve their gross motor skills and also begin to develop some strength and flexibility. They are now able to participate cooperatively in a group setting and follow directions from a coach/teacher.

Gymnastics for older children is available in a variety of formats including recreational classes and competitive team participation. This allows all children to participate in the sport regardless of their size and/or ability. Each child can advance at his/her own speed as he/she learns new skills. Gymnastics not only increases strength, grace and flexibility, but also encourages hard work, discipline and determination. Gymnasts learn to tackle challenges and overcome their fears as they advance in the sport. The action, variety of skills and events, and the reward of accomplishment keep the sport of gymnastics fun and exciting for young athletes.

The skills learned in early gymnastics training will allow your child to be successful not only in gymnastics, but also in any other sports he/she may choose. Kids need to develop healthy habits early — to eat healthy foods and be active every day. Give gymnastics a try! Find a club near you at www.usagymclub.com. You and your child will be glad you did.
Jordyn Wieber
2011 World All-Around Champion
2011 National All-Around Champion

WOMEN’S ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS
There are four events in women’s gymnastics — vault, uneven bars, balance beam and floor exercise. Women’s gymnastics is one of the most beloved sports in the Olympic Games. Every four years a new star is born as the Olympic all-around champion is crowned. Mary Lou Retton, Carly Patterson and Nastia Liukin all achieved this prestigious title! This discipline requires incredible strength and flexibility. Although most sports have seasons, gymnastics is a year-round commitment for athletes at the upper levels.

VAULT
A successful vault begins with a strong, accelerated run. The best vaulters explode off the board with tremendous quickness during the preflight phase of the vault. When the gymnast pushes off the vault table, the judges are looking for proper body position and an instantaneous repulsion. Watch for the height and distance traveled, as well as the number of flips and twists. Gymnasts strive to “stick” their landings by taking no extra steps.

UNEVEN BARS
The most spectacular of the women’s events, the uneven bars demand strength, as well as concentration, courage, coordination and split-second timing. Watch for the big swings that begin in handstands on the high bar, incorporating multiple hand changes, pirouettes and release elements. The entire routine should flow from one skill to the next without pauses, extra swings or additional supports. Watch for the high flying dismount where the gymnast will attempt to stick her landing.

BALANCE BEAM
The beam is only four inches wide and considered the most difficult event by many gymnasts. The gymnast must use acrobatic, tumbling and dance movements in her routine. Watch for acrobatic series consisting of two or more elements performed in a row. The overall execution should give the impression that the gymnast is performing on the floor, not on a beam. Watch for variations in rhythm, changes in level, and the harmonious blend of dance and acrobatic elements.

FLOOR EXERCISE
Usually a favorite event for the fans, the floor routine must be choreographed to music and cover the entire floor area. The gymnast must use a variety of dance and tumbling elements which reflect her personality. Most gymnasts at the international level will do four tumbling passes, changing both the direction and level of movement throughout the routine. Watch for powerful, yet graceful, routines that are fun and exciting.
Danell Leyva
2011 Parallel Bars World Champion
2011 National All-Around Champion
There are six events in men’s gymnastics — floor exercise, pommel horse, still rings, vault, parallel bars and horizontal bar. This discipline requires an incredible amount of strength and power. Below is information on each of the six events.

**FLOOR EXERCISE**
Floor routines consist of dynamic tumbling skills. The best gymnasts will incorporate tumbling passes with multiple twisting and flipping, both forward and backward, throughout their routine. A gymnast must show power and control on this event.

**POMMEL HORSE**
Considered by many to be the most difficult of all men’s events, the pommel horse is also the most subtle. Each move is defined by complex hand placements. The gymnast must perform continuous circular movements interrupted only by the required scissors elements. The entire exercise should flow with controlled rhythm. A gymnast must show precise timing and balance throughout the routine.

**STILL RINGS**
Of all the men’s events, rings are the least stable, therefore requiring the greatest amount of strength. Just as its name suggests, the rings must be kept still while the gymnast is performing. There are two types of moves on the rings — strength positions and swing movements. Those with the best command of the event will display extraordinary skill in arriving at all holds with absolute precision.

**VAULT**
Each vault is categorized in the Code of Points, the official rule book giving the relevant value of each skill performed. A good vault is sometimes described as a “big” vault. The height, the distance of travel, the overall acceleration into the vault and the sudden impact of a no-step, “stuck” landing all create a good impression for the judges.

**PARALLEL BARS**
A parallel bar routine consists of predominantly swing and flight elements. Watch for the gymnast to execute swing elements and skills in which both hands release and regrasp the bars. Some gymnasts move outside the two rails, performing handstands and kips on only one bar.

**HORIZONTAL BAR**
This event is also known as the high bar, and routines consist exclusively of swinging parts without stops. The parts are generally called giant swings, with more specific terms applying to changes in grip, direction and body position. Watch for the gymnast to execute release moves. Look for high-flying dismounts with multiple flips and twists and, of course, the gymnast aims to land the dismount with no extra steps.
Trampoline and tumbling includes four events within its program – trampoline, power tumbling, synchronized trampoline and double mini-trampoline. Both men and women participate in all four events. Some gymnasts choose to focus on just one area, while others participate in all four events.

The first trampoline World Championships event was held in 1964, and trampoline was first recognized as a sport in its own right in the U.S. in 1967. Trampoline made its Olympic debut at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

**TRAMPOLINE**

As a sport, trampoline varies greatly from recreational bouncing. International competition trampolines are larger and more powerful than traditional “backyard” models, propelling trained athletes as high as 30 feet in the air during performances. During two competitive routines of 10 skills each, upper-level athletes can easily demonstrate a graceful array of double, triple and twisting somersaults.

**POWER TUMBLING**

Power tumbling is performed on elevated runways, generally designed with fiberglass rods underneath, that help tumblers propel themselves higher than a basketball goal as they demonstrate speed, strength and skill while executing a series of acrobatic maneuvers. Explosive somersaults with multiple flips and twists are performed by the top-level contenders.

**SYNCHRONIZED TRAMPOLINE**

Synchronized trampoline demands the same athletic skill as individual trampoline, while adding the element of precision timing. Using two trampolines, side-by-side, two athletes perform identical 10-skill routines at the same time. In this most artistic event in the sport, each performs as a mirror image of the other, doubling the visual beauty of trampoline competition.

**DOUBLE MINI-TRAMPOLINE**

Double mini-trampoline combines the horizontal run of tumbling with the vertical rebound of trampoline. After a short run, the athlete jumps onto a small two-level trampoline to perform a rebounding trick immediately followed by a dismount element onto a landing mat. Double mini-trampoline is similar in concept to springboard diving, using a mat instead of water.
Julie Zetlin
2011 Pan American Games All-Around Champion
2010 National All-Around Champion
Rhythmic gymnastics routines are choreographed to music, involving body elements and dance combined with the handling of small equipment including a rope, hoop, ball, clubs and ribbon. The choreography must cover the entire floor and contain a balanced choice of jumps, leaps, pivots, balances and flexibility movements. Only four of the apparatus are competed each quad. The four for the 2012 Olympics are hoop, ball, clubs and ribbon.

Each movement involves a high degree of athletic skill. Physical abilities needed by a rhythmic gymnast include strength, power, flexibility, agility, dexterity, endurance and hand-eye coordination. In the group event, athletes need to develop teamwork, sensitivity, quick adaptation and anticipation, in addition to the aforementioned skills.

**RIBBON**
Ribbon routines are comprised of snakes, spirals, swings, circles, throws and catches, and figure-eight movements. The ribbon must remain constantly in motion.

**ROPE**
Look for swings, circles, rotations, wraps, unwraps, figure-eight-type circling movements, throws and catches of the rope. Gymnasts also leap and jump through the open or folded rope, held by both hands.

**HOOP**
Common movements include swings, rolls, tosses and catches, spins, passes through and over the hoop, rotations of the hoop on the floor, and rotations of the hoop around the hand and other parts of the body. Watch for the high throws and complex techniques for catching the hoop.

**BALL**
Waves, circles, throws and catches, movement with the ball balanced on the hand, bouncing and rolling the ball on the floor and along parts of the body are all key movements.

**CLUBS**
Swings, large circles, small circles, mills, throws and catches and rhythmic tapping are common tricks.

**GROUP**
Five athletes work together as one cohesive unit. Group is judged on the ability of the athletes to demonstrate mastery of body and apparatus skills in a synchronized manner. The more interaction between the gymnasts, the better the exercise. The 2012 Olympic events are ball (five gymnasts), and ribbon (three gymnasts)/rope (two gymnasts).
ACROBATIC GYMNASTICS
Acrobatic Gymnastics combines dance, gymnastics skills, and synchronization. Engaging choreography and brilliant attire are also a part of the sport. The competitors tell a story with their performances, while capturing the audience’s attention with thrilling dynamic and graceful balance skills. The magnificent performances could hardly be accomplished without cooperative effort and mentoring among partners.

There are five events incorporated within the acrobatic gymnastics discipline. The events are women’s pair, men’s pair, mixed pair, women’s group (3), and men’s group (4). Each pair/group performs routines featuring gymnastics tumbling skills, partner balances, and dynamic skills. Balance skills highlight the athletes’ strength and flexibility through pyramids and static positions of the top. Dynamic skills involve somersaulting and twisting with landings on the floor or catches by a bottom partner. Routines are performed on the same 40’ x 40’ spring floor that artistic gymnasts use to perform floor routines.

Athletes of varying heights, weights, and body types are needed for acrobatic gymnastics. Smaller, more flexible athletes are needed as tops, while taller and stronger athletes are ideal for base positions.

**ROUTINES**

Each elite pair/group performs three routines, balance, dynamic, and combined. All exercises are choreographed and performed to music.

**BALANCE EXERCISE**

A balance routine consists of static balance elements, intricate pyramids, transitions between balance holds, and individual elements of flexibility, balance, and agility. In a balance routine, a pair/group is required to perform a variety of balance elements and individual elements. Pair/group tops are typically in handstand, arched handstand, planche, or straddle hold positions supported by one or two hands of a partner. Some balance elements require the top to balance on a partner’s head, torso or foot.

**DYNAMIC EXERCISE**

Dynamic routines include skills with partner throws and pitches to catches by the base partner(s) or landings on the floor. Also included in dynamic routines are individual tumbling skills. Pairs/groups perform a variety of dynamic elements and individual skills. An example of an advanced dynamic skill is a salto with full twist performed from the hands of a partner back to the hands of a partner. Tops may be thrown into the air and perform double and triple salto, some with twists, and land on the floor.

**COMBINED EXERCISE**

A combined routine is just that, a combination of balance and dynamic skills in one routine. Balance elements and dynamic elements are required in the combined exercise. Again, pairs/groups also are required to perform individual skills.
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