

10 Simple Steps to Confidence & Competition Preparation

By John D. Smith- Director- NASA Gymnastics, Gig

Harbor, WA.

Greetings & Welcome to each of you and thanks for choosing to be with us for a fun presentation which we have found to help our kids feel more confident when they compete. We have been using this philosophy for quite a while and continue to enjoy the results of this perspective.

The mind is such a powerful organ. In gymnastics, and in most areas of our lives, it can be a beneficial friend, or a challenging opponent. Our mind knows our strengths and weaknesses. A positive outcome in competition is highly likely, IF we have taken the time to train our mind to perform in a positive manner, in stressful situations. Our hope is that some of the ideas and techniques we share today, may lead to that outcome which many of us seek. Performing in competition the same we consistently train in practice. We are putting the mind and body into a comfort zone through muscle memory, and physical preparation.

Throughout our gymnastics journey we have listened and watched numerous coaches explain how they prepare gymnasts for competition. We have incorporated some of their thoughts into our philosophy and the process of competition preparation. We will share our ideas and those who we have incorporated into our philosophy of preparation.

1. Excellence is learned from day 1 of training. Develop an Expectation within each gymnast, that they can perform skills with superior form, if they work on their flexibility, body shapes & physical strength, with attention to detail.

2. Establish a culture of "understanding" in practice which enables gymnasts to **feel comfortable** in competition.

a. "we will

"

b. "we will

"

c. "we

will

"

d. "if a routine is done poorly,

"

3. Establish and maintain a consistent competition warm up in practice, which helps gymnasts in their meets.

a. "same warm up on each event.

"

b. Do not change the warm up! If they make mistakes in the competition warm up at a meet, reinforce that everything will be fine, as they have done the routine more than 100 times in practice. If they have not done the routine well 100 times in practice, WHY ARE THEY IN THE MEET?

4. During a competition, spend your time encouraging your gymnast with positive words and thoughts. Do not question their effort. They are trying their hardest already and if we as coaches say, "Do your best", or "Put everything you have into this routine", they are interpreting our messages as 2nd guessing of their effort. Of course they will put all they have into their routine, that is why they are at the meet.

5. Learn a new joke or put something happy in their mind 2 or 3 minutes before they compete, allowing positive endorphins to travel through their system, which will enable more confident competition performances.

6. If we physically prepare our athletes for competition we can reduce our own stress and theirs at the meet. When we are in the competition venue, it is a bit late to be giving form corrections. "Point your toes, straighten your legs" etc..., these are tips we should be making in practice while they are doing, straight leg drills and developing foot and toe flexibility and memorized toe and knee positions. They should be second nature. While skills are being performed in training, technique should be our focus, not basic Form. 10 quality routines a day will provide the base needed for improved confidence.

Page 2 10 Simple Steps to Confidence & Competition

Preparation.

7. Line up your gymnasts before each event in practice and establish what the focus will be and what the coach's expectations are and why today's training is so important. At the end of the event rotation, line up, and ask the gymnasts what they improved upon and did they achieve the expectations. This sets the gymnasts up for the same procedure at meets. Establish a consistent pattern of behavior home and away.

8. Remind each gymnast that the competition is simply another place to practice their routines in a different facility. Doing what they do in practice will be enough, if they have developed the technique and physical capabilities to perform their routines well. Do not expect them to do more than they do in practice and realize they may likely do a bit less, until they become more experienced.

9. Compete each day in practice. Who has the best handstand today? Who has the best split today? Who has the best competition warm up routine today? Who has the best salute today? Give your gymnasts the opportunity to win through their effort, technique and physical abilities. Competition confidence is gained through competing each and every day. Kids learn that competition is fun, if they have success in practice, they will have fun at the meet! If coaches are positive and reinforcing, skills and routines will improve rapidly.

10. Show your athletes you believe in them and remind them constantly that this is their gymnastics journey and you are simply one of the lucky people who get to be a part of their adventure. You will do what you can for them and be with them for some time but, this time together is merely a part of their journey.

As coaches we have a responsibility to maintain our personal composure while we are coaching the athletes we enter into meets. Showing a positive expression and providing encouragement throughout the warm up, meet performance, and team meeting at the end of the competition is vital to the positive mental health of the athletes we work with. Displaying poor sportsmanship, immature behavior, using inappropriate language, and causing our athletes to feel disappointed in their efforts, can cause major damage to their self-esteem and potentially cause them to leave the sport they love.

If you have a question about our topic this session, please share it

with us and we will do our best to answer it.

In closing allow me to share a fun short story with you:

Some years ago, one gymnast we worked had a very special opportunity come her way. She wondered if she was up to the task. We talked about it and came to the conclusion that she had done plenty of preparation and this might be a fun step for her. She accepted the offer. When we arrived inside the Key Arena after a special luncheon at the Space Needle, the venue was buzzing with work man finalizing the floor setting and several World and Olympic champions stretching and chatting. As we began a quick stretch and inspected the Beam and the mats and the lighting and the sightlines, we noticed that everyone was going about their pre meet activities, just like us. After studying the equipment, a comfort zone set in when she stepped onto the leather. It was that feeling she had every day at gym. Step after step, drill after drill, the preparation and confidence seemed to flow forward. After all of the drills and most of the skills had been reviewed a simple dismount led to a surprise encounter. After her salute during the open warm up, a strong Russian accent said, "may I use the beam", to which her reply was, "sure!" As the Russian gymnast began her beam warm up, the young American's eyes were closely watching each step and every movement and after a short period of time, she looked to her coach and said, "Hey, she is doing our drills!" As an arm went around her shoulder the quiet reply from her coach was, "sweetheart the drills she is doing were taught to me by the national beam coach of Russia in 1986, so really, we have been doing her drills for a long time. This is 1997" (smile) The 15 year old American performed first in front of the 1996 US Olympic Dream team, the Balance Beam World Champion and the Olympic All Around Champion from Russia and 10,000 fans. While nailing every leap, jump, turn and acrobatic skill with the smoothness of an Elite National champion, she was nearly as stunned as her coach, when her feet landed gently on the landing pad at the end of the routine, to a deafening applause which was met with more than one tear of joy.

It was a pleasure sharing this hour with you and we wish you all the best this season and beyond.

For further thoughts or questions on this presentation, please contact us at coachjohn@nasagym.com