

# GYMNASTICS

## WHAT IS GYMNASTICS FOR ALL?

Gymnastics for All, abbreviated GFA, has also been known as Group Gymnastics and General Gymnastics. GFA is a discipline of USA Gymnastics that allows all gymnasts of various levels and abilities to perform, compete and reach their fullest potential as a gymnast all while performing together as a team. Think of GFA as a big gymnastics show. Athletes perform together in a group utilizing various gymnastics apparatus and equipment, such as floor exercise, mini-trampolines, spring boards, balance beams and more. Athletes also perform partner moves such as lifts, holds and tosses similar to elements you might see in acrobatic gymnastics and cheerleading. Along with synchronized choreography, exciting costumes and music, these elements come together to tell a story and create a powerful performance.

Gymnastics for All provides a unique opportunity for EVERYONE to participate in the sport of gymnastics. It is inclusive of various ages (youth, teens and adults), ability levels (recreational students and competitive athletes), and competitive aspirations (providing various avenues for competition and performance).

Gymnastics for All incorporates two components: GymFest, which is purely performance-based, and TeamGym, which is the competitive aspect. In each aspect, teammates work together showcasing their gymnastics skills and abilities, stunts, and dance and synchronization. GymFest allows props and costumes for a unique and exciting performance for the audience.

TeamGym provides greater structure and rules for a competitive experience. A team consists of 6-16 gymnasts. They compete on 2 events (Group Floor and Jump). Floor is a group floor routine that needs to fulfill certain required elements. The Group Jump event consists of tumbling passes, vault and mini-trampoline. There are Levels 1-7.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN GYMNASTICS FOR ALL?

Because the scope of Gymnastics for All is so broad, there are many answers to this question. Here are a few for you to consider.

Young gymnasts and those at the recreational level find GFA exciting because it provides a great opportunity for them to be part of a team, learn gymnastics skills, and have fun with the performances. It is recommended that children be at least 5 years old to participate in Gymnastics for All.

Gymnasts currently participating at the competitive levels in other gymnastics disciplines enjoy GFA because it provides a competitive outlet with less



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time commitment, more creativity, and still is challenging for these athletes. It is a wonderful outlet for athletes who want to stay involved with the sport of gymnastics.

GFA may be the ultimate “family-friendly” activity! Since there are no limitations on age, children and adults can participate in GFA together. Families can practice, perform, and travel together – now get out there and MOVE!

Athletes with disabilities and special needs can easily participate in a Gymnastics for All program. The program is adaptable to the abilities of the participants and can provide a safe environment for them to move and work on physical development all while being part of a team, a “community”, and getting to perform.

## WHY PARTICIPATE IN GFA?

Here are some of the wonderful benefits that can be derived from a Gymnastics for All program at your club:

- ✘ Quick and inexpensive to add an additional program to your gym
- ✘ Offers competitive and performance choices for athletes and parents
- ✘ Allows more children to participate at lower levels
- ✘ Creates new excitement among parents, athletes and staff
- ✘ Attracts new athletes
- ✘ Retains current athletes
- ✘ Captures additional revenue
- ✘ Provides fun activities for recreational programs
- ✘ Offers more opportunity for coaches who may want to coach at a competitive level but cannot dedicate the time needed for other teams
- ✘ Meets are easy to host and fun to watch

Various opportunities and benefits are available to athletes through participation in Gymnastics for All, such as the following:

- ✘ Physical fitness – especially in the areas of strength, flexibility, agility, and balance
- ✘ Life skills – particularly teamwork, communication and trust among partners, responsibility, and friendship
- ✘ Self-esteem development – being a part of a team, performing in front of people and experiencing a sense of accomplishment can aid in this regard
- ✘ Variety – gymnasts can do GFA in addition to current discipline or other activities/sports



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- ✧ Safety – generally, high-level and complex skills are not being performed in GFA. Also, lower training demands reduce wear and tear on the body.
- ✧ Outlet for Artistic Expression – by combining the love of gymnastics with the love of performance
- ✧ Continued Participation in Gymnastics – GFA is perfect for gymnasts who enjoy tumbling and floor exercise, but may not prefer other apparatus such as beam or bars or are not able to commit to the higher training demands

## HOW DO I START A PROGRAM?

### EQUIPMENT:

Minimal equipment is needed for a GFA program and much of it can already be found in an existing gymnastics facility. Panel mats or carpet bonded foam are acceptable

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*Rejuvenate your recreational gym by adding this dynamic discipline of USA Gymnastics. Not all children are cut out to be artistic gymnasts, but all children can join a TeamGym team. TRICKS Folsom has been doing TeamGym for four years and it is grown to four teams – eight teams if you count TRICKS' other two locations! Our youngest team member is 5 and the oldest will be turning 18 soon. One of our coaches had "retired" to start a family and was thrilled to come back for just one day a week of coaching and 5-7 competitions in the season. The Friday evening downtime became prime time for our team practices.*

*Just one hour a week together is all the practice most teams need in addition to their weekly skills class. Seeing the higher level "big kids" in the gym is a real inspiration to the younger gymnasts. Six years ago we had zero gymnasts in a competitive artistic program, and no place to go for our older gymnasts. In fact, I saw gymnasts move to other gyms as they graduated out of the school-age programs. TeamGym has changed all that. There are now TeamGym athletes who have moved into the artistic programs and some that do both Artistic and TeamGym; there is a flourishing artistic program offering competition in Levels 4-6, and there is a booming tumbling program filled with prospective TeamGym members. At least 50 athletes who would probably have departed the sport or gone to other gyms have been retained – and their siblings, friends and neighbors too.*

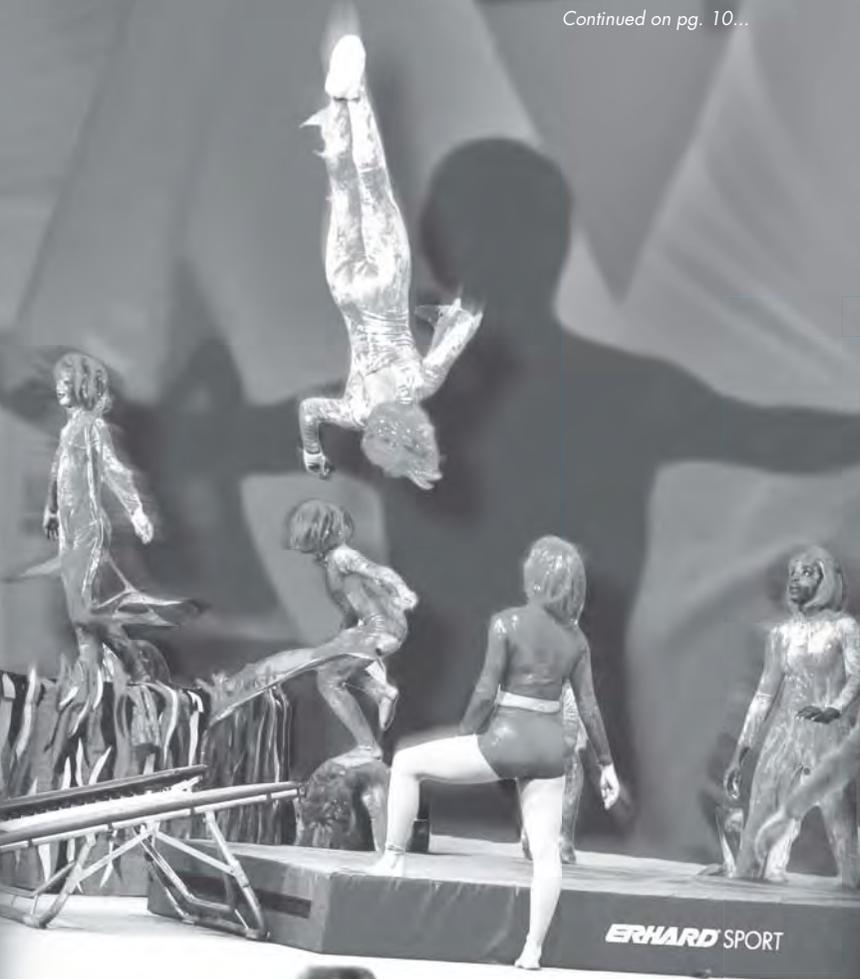
– Tracy Nordheim, TeamGym Judge and TeamGym parent, Folsom, CA

*Retention – GFA helps with retaining your program students who might get frustrated because they either don't have the time or skills for the "team" program. It also allows your high school students that would quit an artistic program because they can't handle the time commitment required to compete for the club and high school artistic programs. It builds the concept of team work in a much different way than artistic because they are all in this together.*

– Kristi Gorney, La Jolla YMCA Gymnastics, La Jolla, CA

*Gymnastics for All has given my athletes a place to belong. Many of our gymnasts have disabilities and could not compete in other USA Gymnastics events. Many others are parents who have renewed their interest in physical fitness because GFA gives them the opportunity to participate in gymnastics events at home and abroad. Our gym is a happier place because of GFA!*

– Cindy Bickman, Chattooga Gymnastics, Chattooga, GA



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performance surfaces, as is a spring floor. Other helpful equipment includes mini-trampolines, spring boards, vaulting apparatus, balance beams, and a selection of mats. A CD player, stop watch, and selection of music will also be needed.

## CLASS STRUCTURE:

For TeamGym, it often works best to have athletes participate in two classes per week. One focuses on gymnastics skill development and the second focuses on the TeamGym performance. It is helpful to ask athletes and parents to make a commitment to the team for the season or year. The group performance depends on the commitment of all of the athletes.

## LEARNING THE SKILLS/COACHING:

Because the gymnastics skills performed in *Gymnastics for All* are the same basic skills learned in the other gymnastics disciplines (women's and men's artistic, acrobatic gymnastics, trampoline and tumbling, and rhythmic), the introductory materials and skill development programs from those disciplines will be helpful and should also be incorporated for GFA.

Presentations and demonstrations on GFA are often conducted as part of USA Gymnastics Regional and National Congresses. These educational events are also a great place to network and learn from other coaches and clubs.

## RULES:

Rules for the TeamGym program and competitions can be accessed for free from the Group section of the USA Gymnastics website ([usagym.org/group](http://usagym.org/group)). ✦

## REFERENCE MATERIALS

*How to Start a General Gymnastics Program* - This book is geared to the gym club owner and is filled with information specific to starting a *Gymnastics for All* program.

