


# GYMNA

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**A**s the Olympics approach, the gymnastics industry must educate parents on the difference between the sport of gymnastics they see on television and the activity of gymnastics that all children can enjoy and benefit from. There are many benefits that recreational gymnastics provides to children in a quality gymnastics program.

### THE PERCEPTION OF THE “SPORT” OF GYMNASTICS

Elite level gymnastics today can be very impressive and sometimes intimidating to the observer. The general public watching elite level gymnasts at the Olympic/World Championships levels will be entertained and excited. But they may also become overwhelmed by the complexity of the skills. The high level of risk that these advanced skills present can influence parents to perceive gymnastics as extremely

difficult and scare many concerned parents away from enrolling their children in gymnastics classes. When gymnastics is perceived as a SPORT for the talented few with the time and money to train full time, it can harm the ACTIVITY of gymnastics by keeping average children away for risk of failure or injury.

### THE “ACTIVITY” OF RECREATIONAL GYMNASTICS

We must make it very clear that gymnastics as a SPORT is as different from the ACTIVITY as driving a Formula 1 racecar

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at high speeds on a track versus driving a family car to the grocery store. Or, when parents take their children to swim lessons to learn to have fun and be safe in the water, this is very different from signing them up for the swim team where they will compete in races. There are millions of children who can benefit from participating in the ACTIVITY of gymnastics. Some may be capable of earning placement on a gymnastics team and winning medals, others will enjoy the numerous benefits they will receive from participating in the activity of gymnastics.

### BY REFERRING TO GYMNASTICS ONLY AS A 'SPORT,' WE LIMIT THE GROWTH OF OUR INDUSTRY

We in the industry of gymnastics education know that the physical, mental, emotional and social benefits of a gymnastics education are tremendous. We see the benefits in our gym every day. We watch our students grow up loving the way they feel about themselves as a result of their gymnastics experience. Once our clients are exposed to gymnastics, if they are successful, they often

stay for years, advance and many become participants in the 'SPORT.' Making the children successful is completely within our ability as educators if we teach



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them with a "PERSONAL BEST" definition of success. The challenge is getting those parents and children not yet exposed to gymnastics into our gyms. Will the Olympics help? Yes it will, but to what degree? How many parents will make the distinction between the SPORT for the talented few, and the recreational ACTIVITY that is available to all? And what can we do collectively to help parents realize the value of investing in a gymnastics education for their children?

### MARKETING THE BENEFITS OF EDUCATIONAL GYMNASTICS

From our websites and brochures to the efforts USA

Gymnastics makes in managing the image of gymnastics, we all must focus on promoting the many benefits gymnastics provides. These benefits include:

- Enhancing neurological and cognitive development in children of all ages.
- Improved fitness, strength, balance, coordination, agility, and flexibility.

Improvements in these areas provide a foundation to learn any activity or sport with greater safety and success.

- Improved emotional control by learning how to manage perceived risks in a positive and successful way. Deconstructing skills into easily achievable steps allows students to experience success quickly and often, improving self-esteem and a positive expectation of success (confidence) towards future challenges.

If we focus now and continue through the Olympics to collectively manage the image of gymnastics as a beneficial and developmental ACTIVITY for all children, enrollment in gymnastics classes across the nation will grow. The end result will be more kids introduced to the sport within our clubs, thereby growing the sport as well. ✱

