

Women's J.O. Compulsory Routines

FRACTIONS OF A POINT: SPLITTING HAIRS OR LAYING A STRONG FOUNDATION?

By Cheryl Jarrett, co-author of the 2013–21 Women's Compulsory Program beam and floor routines

After several months of teaching the new women's Junior Olympic compulsory routines, we have found coaches and judges are both wrestling with the same question: "Are the details worth the headache and frustration?"

Typically, the question is resolved in the gym or behind the table with a shrug and dismissal, "It is only up to a .4 deduction for text errors in the floor and beam routines..." Though a few tenths may not seem worth the hassle for the time it will take to pay attention to every detail in the text of the new compulsory routines, the pay off goes well beyond their final scores!

It is easy to feel overwhelmed reading the text, trying to get every detail and bring it to life in our developing gymnasts. It does not help when we know all too well the glazed-over looks we get from our gymnasts after drilling supple arm movements, first position turn-out, and toe-ball-heel runs. So, here is the rub. Coaches get tired, the gymnasts get bored, and the judges have so much to review. Even though we know something is not exactly correct, we give in to the temptation to look the other way and trick ourselves into thinking that we can just spend more time on the "fun" skills; hoping to pick up those few tenths the gymnast will lose because of their sickled feet or the incorrect pathway of their arms.

Don't get me wrong. I am not advocating taking the fun out of the sport, or drilling the particulars until tears are flowing, and the coaches are pulling their hair out in the corner. I am saying that it is the coaches' job to care about the details, and what separates a great coach from a good coach is their ability to heed the details and encourage the athlete to always give their best in every position, step, pose, and skill.

Think of the value of the details when learning something new in school. A great teacher is not one who accepts close enough to the right answer, but instead finds a way to accept where the student is now, while encouraging and helping them to get the right answers or techniques. A great art teacher will teach specific stroke techniques and training of the eye until the student has mastered each; only then will the student be ready to develop their own creative expressions, based on and developed from the techniques they were meticulously taught.

When you are teaching the athlete the exactness of the routines, you are training much more than just 'open supplely.' Think about what you are really coaching:

- Discipline
- Attention to detail
- Patience to reach improvement
- Strengthening memory/ importance of repetition

- Progression to the next skill/ level comes from the small steps

You are coaching skills correctly because it matters! You do not do everything just for scores; there is a big picture that sometimes gets lost in the pressure to score better. There are decisions every coach has to make when they make corrections and empower the athlete to see the challenge.

It is important to keep improving as a coach or judge. We can always keep learning ways to help our gymnasts, and as we continue to work the basics, we are only building a stronger foundation for future skills and future successes in gymnastics and in life. The big payoff is not in an instant flash of a score or an automatic understanding of why and how the compulsory routines instruct gymnasts to move. Be patient. Take time to teach the details and coach the basics.

Read and re-read the text. Watch the DVDs. Basics do not have to be boring. Details do not have to be tedious. Remind yourself of what you are offering your athletes by being the best coach or judge you can be by not letting them get away with "good enough," but by giving them the gift of a strong foundation, discipline, attention to detail, and so much more.

The platform of success is built with great attention to detail. As coaches and judges, we must consider it an honor to be a part of building such success with our gymnasts. Commit to being about the details, not for the .4, but for being the best we can be and taking seriously the privilege of helping our athletes be the best they can be, as well!

