

Choices! Choices! Choices!

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This quadrennium USA Gymnastics has broadened its scope with the new nationally standardized Xcel program. In doing so, they have given gymnastics club owners and program directors some choices and options in how their gyms choose to participate in the upcoming competitive season.

The options include more than just running the known Junior Olympic compulsory/optional program; or the entirely optional, new national Xcel program. Some gyms are choosing to run both; and some gyms are even running a program that is a combination of the two.

There are as many different reasons for running each program as there are gyms in the U.S. Form your philosophy and find your unique situation — tailor the program to fit your needs. Retention of gymnasts and bringing in



new future gymnasts is everyone's goal, and these new options will help with both.

The familiar JO program offers a competitive, linear, progressive path in Levels 1–10 to that dream of becoming a collegiate gymnast, national team member or even an Olympian. The Xcel program offers an alternative to those who may not have the necessary drive, talent or interest in pursuing that demanding path.

The rules and requirements of the new Xcel program may now be found online on the USA Gymnastics website. To find the new rules, click on the tab that says Women's at the

top of the page and then click on the left side pull down tab that says Xcel. Download the manual, and you are ready to start. An Xcel Code of Points will soon be offered for sale that will contain more detailed information on the allowable skills and judging criteria.

The manual contains a list of your National Xcel committee and contact information so that you may get your questions answered. You have a representative from your region on the committee to help you.

The question I have been asked most frequently in my region is about using the compulsory routines in Xcel competition. There are many reasons coaches choose to do this. The most common reasons seem to be either that coaches use the Xcel program to run optional competitions during a "second season" for their compulsory level gymnasts; or as a bridge for gymnasts, who are moving up a level, to work on their new skills and add them in gradually while still being able to compete.



Choices! Choices! Choices! ...continued

There is a wide range of melding the two programs. The gamut runs from using the JO Compulsory elements in short, truly optional routines to using the full JO Compulsory routines with slight modifications, which are tailored to fit the Xcel requirements of a given Xcel division. (Note Xcel has divisions as opposed to levels.)

Use the program, within the guidelines and rules, to benefit your gymnasts the most. It will boost your enrollment and help keep aspiring gymnasts in the sport.

An example of using the JO to bridge levels is easily shown on bars. If you have a gymnast who does not yet have either her front hip circle or her stride circle, she could compete the JO Level 3 routine without either or even both moves as an Xcel gymnast in the bronze or silver division. These divisions only require one circling move and the routine would meet the requirements without those moves, as the back hip circle fulfills the circling requirement.

A simpler version of the Level 3 bar routine that would fulfill the bronze requirements would be: pullover, cast, back hip circle, underswing dismount. In silver, if you added a glide before the pullover, this routine would have all of the necessary requirements of that division.

It is up to the coach to decide rather to do a minimal routine with just the requirements and stay clean to score high or to add in more elements. A coach could even use the harder allowable skills to allow the gymnast

to showcase her strengths. There are many ways to use the JO compulsory routine and its parts to help the gymnast prepare for the given level.

Using a modification of the JO routines on beam and floor for a second "optional" season can save you a lot of time choreographing and teaching new routines while helping you to prepare for the next compulsory season.

The Level 3 floor routine adapts easily to the bronze and silver divisions. Though there are many extra skills and value parts the Level 3 floor routine as it is written, it will fulfill the bronze requirements. The gymnast could even substitute a back roll or back prone roll for the back handspring, if she did not yet have that skill. Another move could also be substituted for the handstand bridge kick over, if the gymnast did not have that move yet, as it is not necessary to fulfill the bronze and silver acro requirement. (A suggestion would be cartwheel-cartwheel.) To compete the

Level 3 routine as a silver division gymnast more modifications are necessary. A full turn is required and so you would need to replace the half turn and would therefore change the direction and floor pattern. The acro requirements are different than those that exist in Level 3, as well. (Switching the back handspring and the prone roll would satisfy the requirements.)

Finally, if you choose to use the JO routines for Xcel you will need to watch your time limits. If you start with and finish with the music, as is done in the JO compulsory, you will receive a 0.1 overtime deduction.

The Xcel program is an exciting option, which will help with retention of gymnasts. It gives a place for new gymnasts to compete right away and allows us to compete with soccer and other sports on a different level. It creates a place for older gymnasts, who often leave the sport because of a mental block on a single skill, or who need a smaller time commitment to the sport because of increasing other obligations. It allows gymnasts to showcase individual strengths in a given event, or hide weakness in another. The Xcel program is so versatile that anyone can play.

Whether you choose to use the JO program, the Xcel program, or a marriage of the two, consider carefully the philosophy and needs of your individual program and the gymnasts with whom you work when deciding. Your profits will increase with more options. It is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

