
What Do We Do With The Boys?



For some reason, many new gymnastics instructors seem to be intimidated or worried about teaching a boy's class. Teaching gymnastics to boys offers a few different challenges for the gymnastics instructor. Boys tend to have a lot of energy and tend to move quickly through the drills. It is very important to emphasize good form and proper execution. There is no reason however to be overly concerned about this class. ..



Floor Exercise

Tumbling skills for boys are identical to the tumbling skills for girls. The exception to this would be the aerial cartwheel and walkovers. Whereas some men will implement these skills in their routines, it is not a common skill for boys and should not be emphasized in a developmental class.

Pommel Horse

This event is a very difficult event and demands a lot of time and repetition. There are essentially two skills on Pommel horse: leg cuts and circles. Below are some drills and exercises to help develop these skills:

Swings

With hands on pommels, swing legs while lifting the one leg on each side. The entire body should swing like a pendulum. As the swing gets higher, the hand on the side of the leg swing should lift off the pommel.

Leg Cuts

As the swing improves the leg should cut forward as the hand comes off the pommel. At this point the gymnast should practice swinging with one leg in front and one leg in back. The gymnast should then cut the forward leg backward. This should be done on both sides. The next step would be to cut both legs forward and swing with the hips in front. This should be done the same as a regular swing with the lead leg lifting and the entire body swinging like a pendulum.



Support positions

Travel from one end of the horse to the other end using only hands. Arms and legs should be straight and the weight of the gymnast should shift with each hand placement.

Circles

Beginning level gymnasts learn circles on a mushroom. A ½ circle on the mushroom with the hips extended and the body in a slight arch would be a good starting point. The same ½ circle can be done on a panel mat facing the long

way. Take the top part off of the mushroom and place it on the floor and do $\frac{1}{2}$ circles. The top part of the mushroom on the floor is the best drill for learning circles. One way to facilitate the circle is to have the gymnast wear socks and put the top on a panel mat. This allows the gymnast to slide around.

After the gymnast gets comfortable with $\frac{1}{2}$ circles, the circle should be broken down into $\frac{1}{4}$ circles. Start with $\frac{1}{4}$ circle, then $\frac{1}{2}$ and then $\frac{3}{4}$. Gymnast should always have an extended body and slight arch. After they have accomplished the $\frac{3}{4}$ circle, the next step is to move onto a full circle. They should be very proficient at the $\frac{3}{4}$ circle before moving to the full circle. Body should be extended and tight throughout the circle.



It may seem that once a gymnast can do one circle they are all set, however the hardest part always seems to be getting past one circle. I recommend continuing the $\frac{1}{4}$ circle progression. After the gymnast can do one circle, they then do one and $\frac{1}{4}$, one and $\frac{1}{2}$, etc.

Once the gymnast can do two circles in a row, they should be able to do as many as their endurance can handle. The two keys to learning good circles is to practice good technique by doing the $\frac{1}{4}$ circle progressions and doing lots of circles. Doing groups of circles will improve strength and endurance.

Centrifugal force is an important factor in doing circles. When the gymnast pikes his hips and pulls the circle inward, he is doing two things that make the circle more difficult. He is creating a body position (piked instead of layout) that hinders the path of the circle and he is using strength to pull in the circle and is competing with the centrifugal force. Body should always be stretched and tight.

Rings

Rings can be a fun event and offers an opportunity for gymnasts to stay upside down for a while. Rings involves both swing and strength skills. Use of the low rings for strength skills, such as support position, is very important.

Basic swing

Legs straight and body tight; the swing should come from the chest and the entire body should swing, not just the legs. As the swing progresses, the arms should pull the rings backward as the body swings in front. As the body swings backward, the palms of the hand should turn out and the rings should be pushed slightly outward. Swings should start low and should be very smooth and natural.



Inverted hang (layout/pike)

Swing legs up overhead and hold a pike position with the legs parallel to the floor, then extend legs upward to a straight body position. Body should be in line with the straps; arms and legs should be straight.

“Skin the Cat”

From the pike inverted hang position, lower legs to “skin the cat.” Beginning gymnasts can release hands and land on feet. As gymnast gets stronger, they should pull back up to the pike hang.

Pull to inverted hang

From hang gymnast should pull slowly up to inverted hang.

Support on low rings

Gymnast should be at a ring set that is approximately chest high. Gymnast can jump to a support position above rings. Rings should be turned out so that the palms of the hands point forward. Rings should be held slightly away from the body.

Flyaway

This skill should only be done with a competent spotter and a gymnast who has a strong swing. As the gymnast swings forwards, he should bend his knees as he pulls the rings behind him (same as basic swing only with bent knees) at the top of the swing the gymnast should release the rings and his inertia will continue the flyaway. Gymnast should not hold onto the rings as the body passes through the rings.

Vault



With the introduction of the table, vault for men and women is basically the same. In addition to the table, the use of a horse for training can be very beneficial for learning precise hand placement and technique.

Two foot jump on and off the board.

Arms should swing forward and upward.

Jump off block to stick position. Run; jump on board onto block jump off to stick.

Squat on.

Run jump on board, hands on table to squat on, jump off. Body should be stretched as hands contact the table.

Dive Roll

On stacked mats, gymnast should jump to forward roll. This can progress to a handstand, then forward roll

Handstand fall

On soft mat, handstand - fall flat on back. A good handstand should be established, body should be tight as gymnast falls straight. It may be necessary to tell the gymnast to lead with the heels as they fall. Common mistake is to pike when falling. A slight arch is preferred to a pike position.

Handstand arch over barrel

Similar to a handstand fall only the back lands on a barrel and the barrel rolls the gymnast to their feet.



Parallel Bars

This event requires a lot of upper arm strength. The most important skills are a support swing and a handstand. Handstands should be mastered on the low training bars and a good support swing is necessary before attempting a handstand on the regular bars.

Straddle walks on low bars

Start at one end and straddle legs over bars. Move hands in front of legs and lift legs off bars in back swing forward to straddle and continue. Legs should be straight at all times.

Support swings

Keep arms straight and do small swings forward and backward

Rear dismount

Swing and lift body over single rail and land next to bars. Legs should be straight.

Upper arm swings

These can be done on the P-Bar blocks at first. Blocks may have to be put on panel mats in order to raise the blocks to a point that the gymnast's feet don't touch the floor. Arms should be bent 90 degrees and body should swing from shoulders.

Straddle front up-rise

On blocks swing in upper arm support and straddle legs in front on top of blocks, straighten arms to support.



Straddle forward roll

From straddle stand on blocks, place shoulders or upper arms on blocks and do a straddle forward roll to straddle seat.

Long hang swing

On high parallel bars hang and swing as on high bar. If gymnast is too tall to swing without hitting the floor, they may bend their knees.

Long hang swing to upper arm support

Gymnast does a long hang swing and in the rear of the swing pulls body above bars and finishes in an upper arm support. Swing must be high enough in the back to get the shoulders above the bars.

High Bar



High bar is very similar to women's bars, with one major exception. Due to the small size of the high bar, gymnasts should always swing with the thumbs around the bar.

Basic tap swing

Body should be hollow in back, relax through the bottom and kick toes forward in front. Beginners will have a problem with hollow chest in back of swing. Allow a slight pike.

Swing dismount in rear and stick

At the end of back swing, release bar and drop dismount to floor.

Release Re-grasp

At the peak of backward swing, release bar, re-grasp in hollow body position

Cast dismount

On low bar, pike into bar and cast legs backward. As the hips extend, push with arms and release the bar. Stick landing

Swing half turn

Turn should take place at the peak of front swing. Hands remain in mixed grip.

Pull over

On low bar, bring chest to bar and lift legs. Bar will move from chest to hips

Back hip circle

Cast and begin rotation with a backward shoulder lean. Timing is crucial. Hip circle should begin just before hips contact bar. Arms should be straight and body should be hollow.

Under bar shoot

From a support position, fall backwards and bring knees to bar, extend body and lift shoulder upward to arch position. Release bar.

Straddle stand on bars

From a support Gymnast can lift one leg at a time to straddle stand. Spotter can assist in back by holding legs. Once gymnast has both feet on bar, gymnast can fall backwards and release feet after swinging through bottom. If gymnast feels like they are falling forward they should jump off the bar.