



ELEVATING THE STANDARD

Focus

Today's sports reflect society's tolerance of violence. Children relinquish human rights when they step onto a playing field or into a gym. The US Gymnastic Coaches Associations first focus should be on healing the wounds this horrendous abuse has caused. Besides a calling to overhaul the leadership body and philosophy of our NGB, we can certainly make meaningful changes that start healing within the ranks by (re)educating coaches, gym owners, administrators, parents and athletes.

Cultural Changes

A culture of disempowerment has become a disturbing theme. Many gymnasts have been taught to not challenge or question a coach's authority, to not have a voice or speak up to address concerns, to not utilize personal power in the coach-athlete relationship or to stay silent about the way they are being treated.

Gymnast who break any of these "cultural norms" are often subjected to an increasingly harsh retaliatory set of behaviors from coaches and others in the system setting a dangerous dynamic between coach and athlete.

Yelling, degrading, shaming and humiliation is the first shaping behavior some coaches use to mold the gymnasts into a silent participant in this dangerous 'behavior' dance.

The usual response for the harsh treatment by the coach is for the athlete to shut down. They get quiet, they turn inward, become highly emotional, cry and get easily frustrated all leading to increased mistakes—causing the

coach to become even more frustrated. With the lack of proper coaching skills or interpersonal tools required to handle the athlete in this state, the coach now becomes more agitated and turns more to physical punishment for seeking control of the environment.

Coaches implement rope climbs as a form of punishment or running (under the guise of 'conditioning') as a way of letting the athlete know the coach is not pleased with their behavior or training. They often resort to kicking the gymnasts out of the gym—the ultimate form of humiliation. Conditioning is a critical component of gymnastics training, however, this retaliatory behavior is not healthy conditioning—it is abuse. Some coaches even stop coaching gymnasts who don't follow the rules—this isolation does not teach—it is abuse.

The coach has now become part of the problem. If an athlete has natural fears about difficult skills or is returning from injury, the athlete's brain now sees the coach as a threat. More and more athlete brain power is channeled into protecting themselves from the coach's wrath instead of improving gymnastics skills. When an athlete spends 20% of their time concentrating on gymnastics and 80% defending themselves from their coach, this is a problem.

Giving corrections to athletes in what may seem to be a normal direction, often goes uncorrected. Coaches often state, "You are not listening to the correction or not trying what I am asking you to do". Really? The athlete most likely heard the coach the first, second, third and other times they vocalized the correction or the request for change....the athlete either does not understand how to get the requested change completed, is incapable of making the change or may not want to admit their lack of understanding for fear of retaliation. We need to do better. Saying harsh words in a kind voice is not the answer. We as coaches need to find several positive alternatives to making the change desired.

This sets in place the victim-angry coach dynamic. The athlete becomes the victim, has no voice and can't or will not speak up or defend

themselves. They can't communicate fear, injuries, or concern about the coaches coaching style for fear of retaliation or rejection.

They start focusing more on avoiding the coach's anger and become terrified of making mistakes. What used to be a fun sport for them has now become an anxiety producing experience.

Don't be a coach who stops coaching their athlete during competitions because you were so frustrated and disappointed with them. Not only is this unethical, it is dangerous. We need to do our 'homework' and become better and more knowledgeable coaches so our athletes succeed in their competitions.

Within the sometimes nebulous NGB ranking system, coaches and athletes were trained not to speak up or challenge the system. Coaches and athletes were first met with anger, then displeasure and silence. International assignments might be taken away or not given out. A coach might miss out on an important assignment for rocking the boat.

Gymnasts going into other sports are reportedly very quiet, very introverted, afraid to make mistakes, afraid that they will be yelled at by their new coach and are afraid to let the coach know when they are injured. We as an industry will need to spend much time and energy retraining. We need to teach our athletes that they can speak up, be vocal, communicate with their coach, let them know about injuries and most importantly make their sport fun again.

We must (re)educate our athletes by teaching what healthy, appropriate athlete-coach interaction and relationships should be. They must learn they have the power to set boundaries and limits with coaches who treat them abusively. They must be reassured there is a leadership body in place that will hear their voices and handle their complaints and concerns quickly and efficiently. They must learn that gymnastics can be fun again.

We must (re)educate the silent gymnastic parents of our athletes. Too many parents have said nothing when their athlete has been humiliated, ridiculed, abused mentally, emotionally, physically or sexually. These parents have been afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation against their athlete. Many are afraid to speak up because their coach might treat their gymnast worse, stop coaching them or kick them off the team. Gymnasts don't want to change clubs because they don't want to leave their friends even with abusive treatment by their coach. They are afraid to move to another gym as they might end up in another abusive environment. So the gymnasts remains stuck in an abusive circle.

We must (re)educate coaches about the evolving culture that so many of us want and demand in gymnastics—a culture that goes beyond teaching gymnastics skills. We must (re)educate coaches about human development, personal empowerment, conflict resolution, stress management, sexual abuse, personal accountability and sound biomechanics. Coaching workshops that address these core concepts and others must be mandatory at our NGB congress, regional meetings and now through USPGCA.

We must demand a leadership body that is accountable for creating safe, positive and empowering environments for our participants. It will be difficult as there are some that would rather continue in their toxic culture than learn and grow as a gym owner, coach or parent. Leadership always starts at the top. Demanding a NGB that will implement this new culture will begin the trickle down process eventually working its way down to the club level where change by USGCA has already started.

A New Paradigm

Parents and family members should understand their role and strive to be supportive for their athlete by feeding positive energy into the system. The coach must understand each athlete must be themselves to be their best. Each coach should understand the athlete must trust them to be able to work through conflict and resolve differences for each athlete to reach their top gymnastics level. Parents and coaches alike should not be threatened

for feedback into the system. We must embrace and strive to make the athlete-coach-parent triangle as strong and powerful as it can be.

Our NGB needs this very same approach. By surrounding themselves with 'program' personnel and not the organizations that make up the NGB, the control of the industry has been within a narrow scope of input. Our NGB should have representation from our service organizations (coaches and judges) as well as the program representation.

We must embrace this empowering approach to gymnastics. We must be open to learning more. We need to set up workshops for our gymnast, coaches and parents to help continue to improve this culture and to help understand that personal empowerment, respect and mutuality are key components to producing top athletes.

Those coaches who insist on continuing to rage, scream, yell, degrade, embarrass, punish and kick athletes out of the gym will soon find themselves out of our industry.

Yes, leadership should start from the top down. In this rare case, we at the bottom of the gymnastics pyramid will start the culture change with a new paradigm. We will intervene by creating relationships between athletes, gym owners and coaches that are less likely to lead to exploitative practices through educational means.

The USGCA will start with coaches education. Dr. Gerry George has agreed to head up our new USGCA (re)education department. With carefully designed curriculums and testing, we now have an opportunity to self-(re)educate and to do better for our industry.

In our attempt to change the gymnastics culture, we must discover and address the following five (5) mandates

1. Determine the existence and size of the problem (injury surveillance)
2. Identify what may cause the problem (risk factors)
3. Determine strategies and interventions that may prevent the problem

4. Implement prevention strategies
5. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of prevention efforts

Number one above can only be discovered by a thorough investigation into the NGB for how this abuse started and the scope and depth of the issue. Number two and four above can be partly served through the implementation of an improved (re)education system and better coach/athlete/family relationship understandings that are less likely to lead to exploitative practices. The creation and use of SafeSport and a strong NGB argues for number three and five.

We have an exploratory committee identified and they are finalizing the beginning USGCA agenda and norms for our (re)education.

The National Association of Sport & Physical Education (NASPE) has created a set of coaching standards that the USGCA has adopted as our skeletal framework for coaching (re)education. We have added a 9th Domain—SafeSport and will consider all the perimeters this may entail to make it a complete new chapter in our educational stream.

While we have no desire to replicate or duplicate what is offered by our NGB, we as an educated body of coaches feel there is more to do on this front of (re)educating our ranks.

These Standards should be adapted by USGCA. Some protocols will be supplied or offered and some are the responsibility of the individual coach.

NASPE Coaching Standards

National Standards for Sport Coaches, 2nd Edition National Association of Sport & Physical Education, 2005

Domain 1 - Philosophy and Ethics

Establishes a coaching philosophy that focuses on safety, development and well-being of the gymnast. As a key leadership figure, the coach must model and teach appropriate behavior in all aspects of coaching and maintain ethical conduct during training and competitions: at all times.

Standard 1 - Develop and implement an athlete-centered coaching philosophy

Prepare an athlete-centered coaching plan
All participants, including athletes and families, to be included in the plan's discussion

Standard 2 - Identify, model, teach positive values learned thru gymnastics participation

Identify and create positive values for coaching staff to understand and follow
Understand fully how to teach all age groups

Standard 3 - Teach and reinforce responsible personal, social, and ethical behavior of all people involved in the gymnastics program

Openly display NGB ethics, discuss in staff meetings
Insert into team handbook, parent's guide, coach manual
Fully understand and implement all SafeSport policies and suggestions

Standard 4 - Demonstrate ethical conduct in all facets of the program

Domain 2 - Safety and Injury Prevention

Be prepared to act as first responder and provide emergency care in the event of an accident or injury. Coach must recognize high-risk situations, unsafe equipment, facilities, and environmental conditions to ensure gymnasts safety and make necessary modifications to the training environment should unsafe conditions exist.

Standard 5 - Prevent injuries by providing a safe facility

Obtain or create equipment inspection protocol for the entire facility

Standard 6 - Ensure all necessary safety equipment is available, properly used

Keep abreast of newest training aids
Ensure all staff understands how to properly use all equipment and aids

Standard 7 - Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants

Prepare an emergency plan for a variety of natural disasters
Rehearse all plans

Standard 8 - Identify physical conditions that predispose gymnasts to injuries

Evaluate each athlete during specific times to identify weaknesses, inabilities

Standard 9 - Recognize injuries and provide immediate and appropriate care

Be properly certified in first aid
Be properly trained in taping/bracing, etc.

Standard 10 - Facilitate a coordinated sports health care program of prevention, care, and management of injuries	Secure a relationship with community first responders Create a protocol for injuries
Standard 11 - Identify and address the psychological implications of injury	Identify the professionals in each field of sports psychology, mental imagery, etc. in creating a plan

Domain 3 - Physical Conditioning

Implement research-based, developmentally appropriate drills and teaching techniques that support gymnastics development while maintaining safety. Encourage healthful decisions by the gymnast to promote healthy lifestyles and low-risk training practices.

Standard 12 - Design programs of training, conditioning, and recovery properly utilizing exercise physiology and biomechanical principles.	Prepare an annual periodization chart for all appropriate levels thru biomechanical researched material
Standard 13 - Teach and encourage proper nutrition for optimal physical and mental performance and overall good health.	Create a relationship with nutrition experts, dietitians in creating a plan
Standard 14 - Be an advocate for drug-free sport participation and provide accurate information about drugs and supplements.	Understand all WADA requirements Promote a tobacco-free, alcohol-free environment in and out of the training gym for all
Standard 15 - Plan conditioning programs to help gymnasts return to full participation following injury.	Identify specific conditioning program periods and create all plans, including injury recovery

Domain 4 - Growth and Development

Be knowledgeable about age and skills levels of gymnasts ensuring progress at the appropriate rate. By recognizing patterns of cognitive, motor, emotional and social development, the coach can create effective learning environments that allow gymnasts to progress and improve at different rates. Be properly trained to recognize the need to modify practice and competitive strategies to accommodate the gymnast's readiness for competition.

Standard 16 - Apply knowledge of how developmental change influences the learning and performance of gymnastic skills.	Become knowledgeable in child development understanding cognitive, social, physical, psychological aspects of development and learning
Standard 17 - Facilitate the social and emotional growth of gymnasts by supporting a positive sport experience and lifelong participation in physical activity.	

Standard 18 - Provide gymnasts with responsibility and leadership opportunities as they mature.	Create a system of leadership roles for athletes as they progress through the program
<u>Domain 5 - Teaching and Communication</u>	
Plan and implement organized practices so gymnasts have a positive learning experience. Understand the fundamentals of gymnastics and use a variety of systematic instructional techniques to provide a positive learning environment and maximize the potential of each gymnast. Be aware of their own expectations of a gymnast's potential and how it impacts athlete performance.	
Standard 19 - Provide a positive learning environment appropriate to the characteristics of the gymnasts and goals of the program.	Understand and implement systematic goal-setting for each program level, each athlete
Standard 20 - Develop and monitor goals for the athletes and program.	Prepare an organized plan of goal monitoring for the program, the athletes, coaches, etc.
Standard 21 - Organize training based on seasonal/annual practice plan to maintain motivation, manage fatigue, allow peak performance at appropriate times.	See Periodization Understand the Female Athlete Triade
Standard 22 - Plan and implement daily training activities that maximize time on task and available resources.	Plan practices with set rotations coordinating the annual plan's number of elements, etc. eliminating the "one more" mentality of coaching
Standard 23 - Utilize appropriate instructional strategies to facilitate athlete development and performance.	(Re)education in positive coaching styles
Standard 24 - Teach and incorporate mental skills to enhance performance and reduce sport anxiety.	Study and implement tactics such as Dr. Ali or Dr. Selk (or other experts) for understanding how athletes listen and learn
Standard 25 - Use effective communication skills to enhance individual learning, group success, and enjoyment in the gymnastics experience.	Understand the many forms of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athlete-to-Coach • Coach-to-Coach • Parent-to-Coach • Coach-to-Parent
Standard 26 - Demonstrate and utilize appropriate and effective motivational techniques to enhance athlete performance and satisfaction.	Goal setting
<u>Domain 6 - Sport Skills and Tactics</u>	
Develop skills of all members into efficient and successful athletes. Know how to utilize athletes' abilities to maximize meaningful participation and success and rely on up-to-date understanding of specific gymnastics skills and competition tactics.	

Standard 27 - Know the skills, elements of skill combinations, and techniques associated with gymnastics.	Implement all resources for skill development Continual (re)education
Standard 28 - Identify, develop, and apply competitive sport strategies and specific tactics appropriate for the age and skill levels of participating gymnasts.	Understand the NGB level system, create a 4-5 year plan for each level and each athlete Be strategic in using the NGB qualifying level system
Standard 29 - Use sound methods for planning practices, competition preparation and analysis.	Create a list of competition items to teach within the training to all athletes (and families) Create/Utilize a program for analyzing scores, etc. to help create the best athletes

Domain 7 - Organization and Administration

Be an integral resource in the overall administration of the gymnastics program. Provide information regarding needs of the gymnast, serves as key communicator of program goals and policies, and facilitate compliance with established program policies. Program accountability and public trust depend a great deal on the coach's administrative skills.

Standard 30 - Demonstrate efficiency in competition management.	Be aware of all aspects of a competition and what the coaches role is within
Standard 31 - Be involved in public relation activities for the gymnastics program.	Prepare basic PR statements for club, athletes, other staff, etc.
Standard 32 - Manage human resources for the program.	Understand each staff/coaches role within the club
Standard 33 - Manage fiscal resources for the program.	Understand program/team budgeting
Standard 34 - Facilitate planning, implementation, and documentation of the emergency action plan.	Prepare an emergency plan for a variety of natural disasters Rehearse all plans
Standard 35 - Manage all information, documents, and records for the program.	Keep updated attendance records Keep updated gymnastic rules and regulations
Standard 36 - Fulfill all legal responsibilities and risk management procedures associated with coaching.	Understand all risk management for each level or program within

Domain 8 - Evaluation

Be able to make accurate and timely decisions regarding all aspects of the gymnastics program. Planning program goals start with careful analysis of athlete ability and program needs. Evaluation becomes a critical part of gymnast and staff retention as well as maintaining program accountability. Systematic evaluation ensures the gymnastics program runs smoothly and efficiently where goals and objectives of the program remain the focus for the coach, gymnast and team.

Standard 37 - Implement effective evaluation techniques for athlete performance in relation to established goals.	Create complete evaluation forms for each appropriate level/athlete to include strength, flexibility, ROM, dance ability and more
Standard 38 - Use a variety of strategies to evaluate athlete motivation and individual performance as they relate to season objectives and goals.	Create monitoring system for athlete's performances on a periodic basis and share with the athlete-coach-family triangle
Standard 39 - Utilize an effective and objective process for evaluation of athletes in order to establish individual goals.	
Standard 40 - Utilize objective & effective process for evaluation of self and staff.	Create and implement a process for self and 360° evaluations of all coaches
<u>Domain 9 - SafeSport</u>	
Standard 41 - Utilize SafeSport and local authorities when necessary	Understand the SafeSport model and what it is intended to accomplish Include contact information in athlete, staff, parent guidelines, handbooks and manuals Understand the role of the local authorities



GYMNASTICS COACHES ASSOCIATION