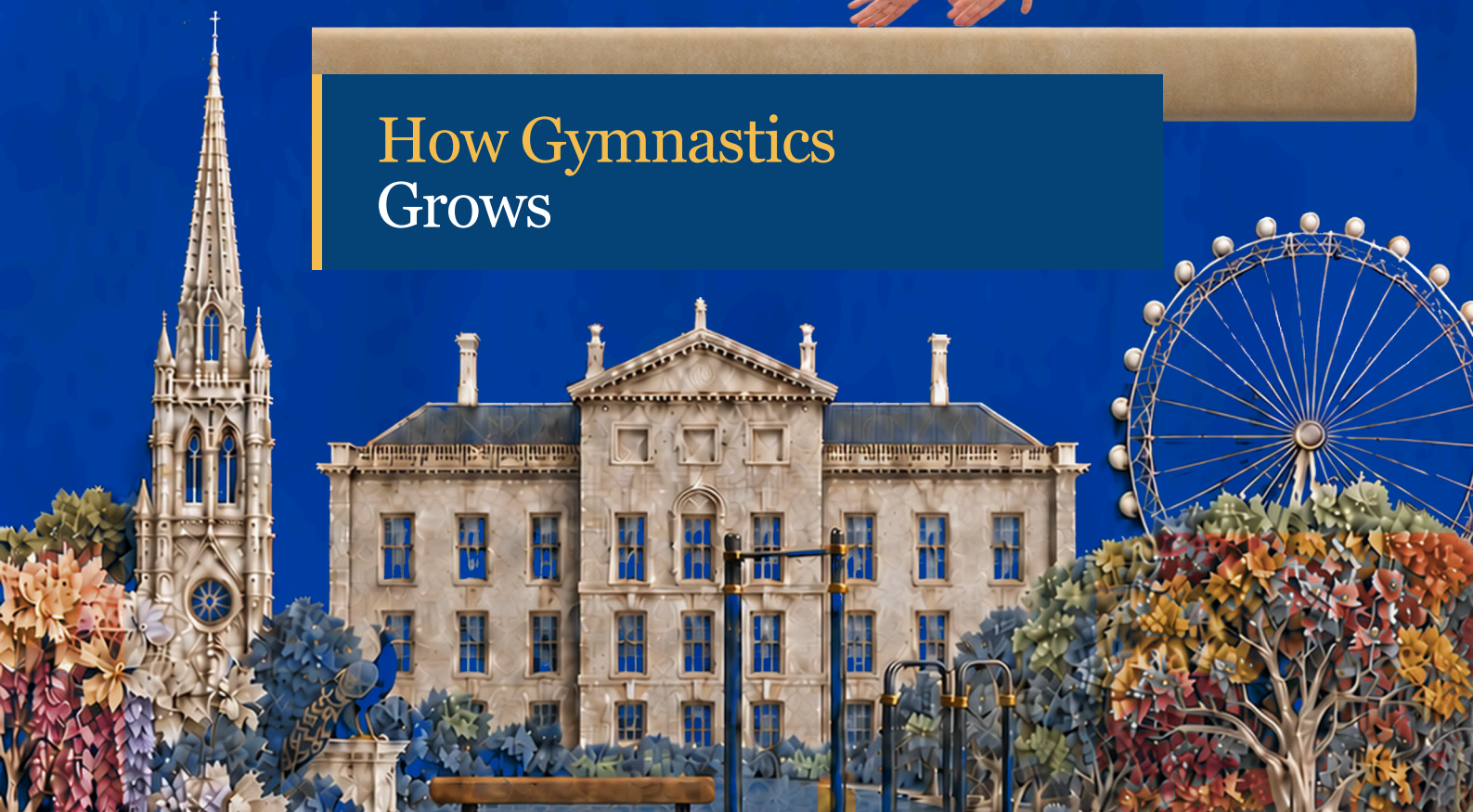


KENSINGTON

GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE



How Gymnastics
Grows



LONDON'S FAMILY GYMNASTICS GUIDE

FOR YOUNGER READERS

Chelsea Sees How Gymnastics Grows

Your young-reader guide to Issue 5



Hello again! I’m Chelsea.

I am the illustrated gymnast of *Kensington Gymnastics Magazine*. I help make important ideas about gymnastics clearer, friendlier and easier for young readers to understand.

WHAT GROWTH CAN MEAN

Growth is not only becoming taller or learning a harder skill. It can mean understanding more, connecting movements, joining a new group, adapting when something changes or finding a way to keep going.

Some pages are written mainly for grown-ups. When you see me, I will help bring one of those ideas closer to a gymnast’s world.

In Issue 5, we will discover...

How good questions help knowledge grow	Why growing bodies can sometimes feel different
How muscles, food and recovery support movement	How skills connect step by step
Why a score records only one moment	How new competition pathways are built
How gymnastics can continue through adult life	How London places can become part of training

You do not need to grow in the same way or at the same speed as anyone else. Ask questions, listen to your coach and notice what you are learning.

CHELSEA’S MESSAGE

“Growing in gymnastics is not only learning a harder skill. It can mean understanding more, adapting, helping others and finding a way to keep going.”

KENSINGTON GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE

London's Family Gymnastics Guide

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Kensington Gymnastics Magazine is an independent educational publication created in London for families, gymnasts, and anyone interested in understanding gymnastics more clearly.

This magazine exists to explain — not to persuade.
To inform — not to promote.

To bring clarity to a sport that is widely admired, often misunderstood, and rarely explained in calm, accessible language.

Each issue explores gymnastics through science, experience, and culture — from children's movement and development, to anatomy, food, lifelong participation, and the world's most important gymnastics events.

Written from London and shaped by life in a global city, this publication reflects a simple belief: movement matters most when it is understood.

EDITOR

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Contents

Editor's Letter 05

How Gymnastics Grows

Editorial Manifesto 07

Clarity, evidence, and calm understanding

From the Research Desk 08

Why I Chose to Become a Doctor — Twice

FEATURE 12

From Lausanne to London

What new sport science can — and cannot — tell gymnastics families

FOUNDATIONS

Gymnastics Anatomy 31

Legs for Jumping and Landing

Food, Growth & Gymnastics 48

Vitamins: Small Nutrients, Big Effects

Recovery in Gymnastics 57

Growing Bodies, Changing Recovery

GYMNASTICS FOR LIFE

Masters & Lifelong Movement	61
Building a World Cup for a Lifetime	
The Kensington Gymnast	75
Gymnastics for Life — Lived in Kensington	

LONDON & THE WORLD

Gymnastics in our city and across the international stage.

Gymnastics in London	83	The World of Gymnastics	95
A New Competition Pathway for London		Inside the European Championships	

UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT

The Language of Gymnastics	114
How Skills Connect	
Questions We’re Asked	117
Moving Groups and Starting a New Term	
Gymnastics Myths	125
More Than the Score	

Closing Reflection	133
Built Over Time	

SOURCES & FURTHER READING	134	ABOUT THE EDITOR	141	PARTNERSHIPS	142
The complete evidence trail for Issue 5					
Stefan Kolimechkov PhD					

FROM THE EDITOR

ISSUE 5
SEPTEMBER 2026

Editor's Letter

Gymnastics grows in more than one way: through the body, through knowledge, through opportunity and through a relationship with the sport that can deepen across a lifetime.

September often makes change easier to notice. A child returns to gymnastics after the summer. The apparatus is familiar, but the body may feel different. A group changes. A task that once felt simple needs fresh attention. Another child discovers that something practised before the break now makes more sense.

We often describe all these experiences with one word: *progress*. Yet progress is not one thing, and it does not always move in one direction.

This issue looks at how gymnastics grows.

Scientific understanding grows through questions, measurement, disagreement and revision. In From the Research Desk, I reflect on why I chose to begin a second doctorate after completing my first PhD. The decision was not about collecting another qualification. It came from wanting to ask better questions and to become more careful about how evidence is produced, interpreted and communicated.

That care continues in our Feature, which travels from the European College of Sport Science Congress in Lausanne back to gymnastics families in London. A new finding can be interesting without being final. A conference presentation can open an important conversation without becoming advice for every child. Knowledge grows when curiosity is matched by method, and when uncertainty remains visible.

The body grows differently. Bones lengthen, proportions change and familiar movement may temporarily feel unfamiliar. Anatomy follows the muscles of the thigh and calf through jumping and landing without pretending that one muscle works alone or that anatomy replaces coaching. Vitamins separates nutritional understanding from supplement promises, while Recovery considers how adults can respond calmly when a growing child appears more tired, less coordinated or less comfortable.

Growth should never become a convenient explanation for everything. Pain, persistent difficulty or concern still deserves attention. Nor should a changing body be treated as a judgement about ability. Sometimes the responsible response is to observe, communicate, adapt and allow time.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Continued

As a coach, researcher and gymnast, I have learned that adaptation is not a lesser form of progress. It is often what makes progress possible. That lesson becomes especially visible across a lifetime.

The Masters Gymnastics World Cup did not arrive as a finished international system. It grew through people willing to organise, travel, compete and imagine something larger. The record preserved in this issue shows a pathway still being built. Its value lies not only in numbers or winners, but in creating another place for adult gymnasts to continue meeting through the sport.

The Kensington Gymnast brings that idea closer to home. More than two decades after I began gymnastics, training no longer belongs to one building or one stage of life. Holland Park and Kensington Gardens have become part of the practice: places where consistency, adaptation and the desire to continue can coexist with the specialist preparation that still requires a gymnastics centre.

Chelsea gives younger readers a simple version of the same message: growing in gymnastics can mean learning, asking, adapting, helping and trying again. The harder skill is only one possible sign.

“

*Growth is not one direction,
and progress is not one
number.*

COACH · RESEARCHER · MASTERS GYMNAST

Other pathways begin with children. The London Community Competition Programme asks whether recreational gymnasts can meet competition through a clearer structure. The European Championships show what a mature continental tradition can become across generations. Both remind us that competition is a system built by people, and it should serve the gymnasts who enter it.

The final chapters return these ideas to ordinary family experience. Skills connect through foundations, variations and carefully chosen tasks. Moving group can bring challenge and uncertainty at the same time. A score can record a performance without defining the child, the coach or the value of taking part.

Not every gymnast needs the same destination. One child may enjoy a weekly class without competing. Another may want to test a routine. An adult may return after many years or change how and where training happens. A stronger sport recognises these forms of participation without arranging them into a single ladder of worth.

Across Issue 5, we follow bodies, knowledge, skills and pathways as they develop. None grows perfectly or is completed in one lesson, result or season. What matters is whether the process remains thoughtful, safe, meaningful and open to what the next stage may require.

I hope these pages help you recognise more than one kind of growth, and value the time through which it is built.

EDITOR

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

EDITORIAL MANIFESTO

Clarity, evidence, and calm understanding

The principles behind every issue we publish.

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine exists to make gymnastics understandable.

Created and written in London, this publication reflects the discipline, tradition, and intellectual confidence of the city it serves. Its purpose is to explain gymnastics clearly, thoughtfully, and responsibly, drawing on science, professional experience, and respect for the people who practise it.

We believe that **understanding matters more than instruction, and clarity more than opinion**. Gymnastics is complex by nature, and simplification without explanation often leads to confusion rather than confidence. Our role is not to prescribe, but to illuminate.

Where scientific evidence exists, this magazine draws on it carefully and conservatively. Where evidence is evolving, uncertainty is explained honestly rather than ignored. Where experience matters, it is valued without exaggeration or urgency.

This magazine is written with patience. Knowledge is built gradually, not rushed. Issue by issue, our aim is to support better conversations around movement, development, and lifelong participation in gymnastics.

CLARITY

Explain before advising.

EVIDENCE

Be careful with certainty.

RESPECT

Put people before claims.

IN THIS ISSUE

In Issue 5, we follow how gymnastics grows: through questions that strengthen knowledge, bodies that change, skills that connect and pathways that people build. We consider how nutrition and recovery support young gymnasts, how competition can widen participation, and how a relationship with gymnastics may continue across places and a lifetime, while keeping evidence, uncertainty and people clearly in view.



FROM THE RESEARCH DESK

Research, discovery and the editor's scientific journey

ISSUE 5 • INAUGURAL INSTALMENT

Why I Chose to Become a Doctor — Twice

What a second PhD has taught me about research, curiosity and the years of work behind a scientific qualification



Research in practice. Dr Stefan Kolimechikov conducting musculoskeletal ultrasound during human data collection at the University of Greenwich. Learning to use and standardise new measurement methods became an important part of the second doctoral journey.

Image: Stefan Kolimechikov research archive

Why would someone who already has a PhD choose to start all over again?

I have asked myself that question more than once.

I completed my first PhD in Physical Education in 2018. Reaching that point had taken years of study, research and work in gymnastics. It would have been perfectly reasonable to regard the doctorate as the end of my formal education.

But I never really saw education that way.

By 2021, I was looking for something different: a new scientific environment, new research methods and questions that would take me beyond the work I had already completed. I was increasingly interested in ageing — particularly what happens to muscle strength, body composition and physical function as we grow older, and what might help us preserve them.

That curiosity brought me to the University of Greenwich.

I discovered an advertised research project in Human Sciences in May 2021. Over the months that followed, I prepared a research proposal, completed the application process and attended an interview. On 11 October 2021, I registered for the MPhil/PhD programme.

And suddenly, despite already having one doctorate, I was a doctoral student again.

The subject was different. The laboratory methods were different. The population was different. And, perhaps most importantly, I had to become comfortable with being a learner again.

Why do another PhD?

For me, the answer was never simply to collect another qualification.

It was an opportunity to learn new ways of conducting human research, work within a British university research environment and explore questions about ageing, muscle and physical function that genuinely interested me.

The title comes at the end. The learning happens long before it.



FROM THE RESEARCH DESK

Research, discovery and the editor's scientific journey

JOURNEY / CHRONOLOGY

How the work unfolded

A doctorate can eventually become a thesis on a library shelf. The years before that are much less tidy: training, protocols, participants, measurements, presentations, revisions, unexpected problems and questions that keep changing as you learn more.

2021 Beginning again

Applied for and joined the MPhil/PhD programme in Human Sciences at the University of Greenwich. The research direction centred on microcurrent, resistance exercise, muscle strength, body composition and physical function.

2022 Learning to measure

Completed training in microcurrent, musculoskeletal ultrasound, Bod Pod body-composition assessment and HemoCue measurement. Ethical approval was obtained for the first intervention, human data collection began, and the study was subsequently registered as a clinical trial.

2023 Beyond the laboratory

The first peer-reviewed paper from the programme appeared in the 2023 print volume of the *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, after online publication in November 2022. Preliminary findings were presented at international meetings, including ECSS in Paris.

2024 Testing ideas internationally

Research from the doctoral programme was presented at the ACSM Annual Meeting in Boston and at the ECSS Congress in Glasgow. Each presentation created another opportunity for questions, criticism, discussion and refinement.

2025–26 From measurements to meaning

The work increasingly shifted from collecting information towards analysing it, interpreting what the results can — and cannot — show, disseminating research and developing the doctoral thesis.

Next Completing the doctorate

The immediate goal is straightforward to describe and much harder to achieve: complete the thesis, submit it and defend the work successfully. Whatever happens afterwards should grow from the questions the research leaves behind.

Personal experience → scientific explanation

When I began, much of my attention was naturally on completing tasks: learn this method, collect this measurement, prepare this presentation.

Over time, my perspective changed.

A measurement is only useful if we understand what it represents and how reliably it was obtained. A statistically significant result is not automatically an important one. And a study rarely provides the final answer to the question that started it.

Research gradually teaches you to become more careful with conclusions.

That may be one of the most valuable lessons of the entire process.

Research decisions and changing questions

The original project concerned the effects of microcurrent and resistance exercise on outcomes related to muscle, body composition and physical function.

But doctoral research does not happen in isolation. Reading the literature, learning new methods, working with participants, analysing data and discussing findings with other researchers continually expose new questions.



Greenwich, London — October 2021. *The second doctoral journey began at the University of Greenwich, bringing an established background in gymnastics and physical education into a new programme of Human Sciences research.*

Image: Stefan Kolimechikov research archive

Some questions disappear because the evidence does not support them. Others become more interesting precisely because the answer is uncertain.

Learning which questions deserve to survive is part of becoming a researcher.



FROM THE RESEARCH DESK

Research, discovery and the editor's scientific journey

METHODS / PEOPLE / GOVERNANCE

Behind the qualification

Most people encounter research at the end: a journal article, conference presentation or completed thesis. Behind those outputs is a much less visible process.

Learning to measure



Learning body-composition measurement. Training with the Bod Pod formed part of the laboratory-method development undertaken during the Greenwich doctorate.

Image: Stefan Kolimechkov research archive

One of the biggest changes during this doctorate has been learning how much work can sit behind a single number in a research paper.

Body composition, for example, cannot simply be judged by looking at someone. One method I trained to use was air-displacement plethysmography with the Bod Pod.

The instrument estimates body volume by measuring changes in air displacement. Combined with body mass, this allows body density and estimates of body composition to be derived.

But the machine does not make good science automatically.

Participant preparation, clothing, calibration, measurement conditions and consistent procedures all matter. The same principle applies across research methods: measurement quality begins before the number appears on the screen.

Research with people



Small samples, careful procedures. Laboratory measurement formed one part of the broader methodological training behind the doctoral research.

Image: Stefan Kolimechkov research archive

Human research carries responsibilities that extend well beyond measurement.

Before the first intervention could begin, the project required university ethical approval. The research plan, participant procedures and risks had to be considered in advance. The study was later registered publicly as a clinical trial.

Working with participants also changes how research feels.

A row in a dataset represents a person who gave their time and trusted the research process. Procedures therefore need to be not only scientifically useful, but ethical, consistent, respectful and appropriately governed.

That responsibility remains even after the participant leaves the laboratory.

HOW RESEARCH WORKS

What happens before a finding reaches the reader?

01 QUESTION

What are we trying to understand?

02 PROTOCOL

How can the question be investigated systematically?

03 ETHICS & GOVERNANCE

Is the research appropriate, safe and responsibly designed?

04 MEASUREMENT

How will the relevant outcomes be collected consistently?

05 DATA

What information did the study actually produce?

06 ANALYSIS

What patterns are present — and how uncertain are they?

07 INTERPRETATION

What can the results reasonably tell us?

08 PEER REVIEW & DISSEMINATION

How does the work withstand scrutiny and become part of the wider scientific conversation?

The published finding is usually the part everyone sees. Most of the research happened before it existed.



FROM THE RESEARCH DESK

Research, discovery and the editor's scientific journey

REFLECTION / FORWARD LINK

What the process changed

“ *The doctoral journey may end with a qualification. The real journey is learning how to ask better questions, measure carefully, accept uncertainty and keep going when the answer is not yet clear.* **”**

— Stefan Kolimechikov

Research has made me less impressed by certainty.

That might sound strange. We often imagine science as the place where questions receive definitive answers.

In practice, the more closely I have worked with research, the more attention I have learned to give to limitations: how something was measured, who participated, how large the sample was, what alternative explanations exist, whether an association really demonstrates cause, and whether another study could reproduce the result.

That does not make scientific evidence weaker.

It makes good evidence more valuable.

I also think differently about questions now.

At the beginning of a research journey, finding the answer can feel like the goal. With experience, asking a question that can genuinely be investigated becomes just as important.

And that is why completing this doctorate will not end my research journey.

Some of the questions I now care most about return directly to the sport that has shaped most of my life: gymnastics.

Who actually has the opportunity to participate? How should gymnastics participation be measured scientifically? What happens when participation continues into adulthood and later life? And what might different histories of gymnastics participation mean for physical fitness, physical function and health?

I do not yet know where all those questions will lead.

That is precisely why they are worth asking.



From research to scientific discussion. Presenting the developing doctoral programme within the University of Greenwich research community. Communicating research — and answering questions about it — became another part of learning how scientific ideas develop.

Image: Stefan Kolimechikov research archive

From the research desk to the scientific stage

Scientific congresses have become an important part of this journey. They are places where researchers present work before specialist audiences, encounter ideas outside their own projects, answer difficult questions and return home thinking differently.

This summer, that journey took me once again to the Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science — this time in Lausanne.

On the pages that follow, the focus moves away from my own research journey and towards the wider scientific conversation.

What was being discussed there — and what might some of that science mean for gymnastics families here in London?

Turn the page →

Feature · From
Lausanne to London

FEATURE

From Lausanne to London

What new sport science can - and cannot - tell gymnastics families.

BY DR STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV



The SwissTech Convention Center at EPFL, dressed for ECSS Lausanne 2026 on the eve of the congress.

PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

A large school study, a short training trial, an exploratory gymnastics experiment and a local poster can share one congress programme. They do not carry the same kind of answer. Four signals from ECSS Lausanne 2026 show how families can read new sport science without asking it to say too much.

This Feature follows four signals: childhood activity and movement competence; strength without detected change in measured muscle thickness; consistency and adaptability in a gymnastics skill; and KGM's own recreational-gymnastics poster.

Their differences in size, design, population and publication stage are the point. Responsible reading begins before the headline.

**EXPERT
LENS**

Professor Asgeir Mamen has attended every ECSS Annual Congress since Nice 1996. His family-first perspective on opportunity, enjoyment and skill runs through this Feature.

A congress of many conversations

LAUSANNE - 7-10 JULY 2026

QUESTIONS BROUGHT HOME TO LONDON

The 31st Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science brought researchers, practitioners and students from many countries to Lausanne. Hosted by the University of Lausanne and EPFL, it was not a meeting about one branch of sport or one age group. It placed performance, health, medicine, coaching, psychology, biomechanics, physiology, nutrition, technology and physical activity inside the same four-day conversation^[1].

The formal programme moved between large plenary lectures, invited and exchange symposia, parallel oral sessions, print-poster discussions and e-posters. Around them were masterclasses, special-interest groups, an exhibition, professional meetings and social gatherings. The 1,097-page Book of Abstracts shows the breadth of work assembled; the pages that follow select only a few questions with a direct family or gymnastics connection^[22].

Plenary

MAJOR QUESTIONS SHARED ACROSS
THE WHOLE CONGRESS

Symposia

INVITED AND EXCHANGE SESSIONS
JOINING SEVERAL PERSPECTIVES

Oral

SHORT PODIUM PRESENTATIONS
FOLLOWED BY SCIENTIFIC
DISCUSSION

Posters

PRINT SESSIONS BUILT AROUND
DIRECT QUESTIONS AND
CONVERSATION

E-posters

ADDITIONAL STUDIES AVAILABLE IN
DIGITAL PRESENTATION FORM

Beyond

MASTERCLASSES, MEETINGS,
EXHIBITIONS AND PROFESSIONAL
EXCHANGE

One congress, many formats. The official programme combined plenaries, invited and exchange symposia, oral and print presentations, e-posters and wider professional activity^[1,22]. This Feature discusses only a small, family-relevant selection.

Why this belongs in a family gymnastics magazine

GROWING AND LEARNING

Bajer and Ludyga asked how muscular strength and executive functioning are associated at different ages; Galantine and colleagues examined maturity timing and sprint performance in youth team sports^[20,21].

TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

Researchers asked how strength develops, how skills remain dependable and how testing should be interpreted^[11,16-19].

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Across the programme, sessions considered mental health, sleep, injury, nutrition, ageing and environments that can support wellbeing^[1,22].

FROM SCIENCE TO PRACTICE

For KGM, the value is not the size of the programme. It is whether a carefully bounded idea can improve how adults understand and support a child.

A congress supplies questions, methods and early signals. Families still need help deciding what each one can honestly mean.

A conference is where knowledge moves

One abstract may report a new association. Another may test an intervention. A third may offer an exploratory idea. They can sound equally confident on a programme page, but they do not carry equal certainty or answer the same question.

PEER-REVIEWED EVIDENCE

Full papers that have passed journal review. Stronger scrutiny does not remove limits of design, population or measurement.

CONFERENCE EVIDENCE

New work presented for discussion. It may later change through full analysis, review, publication or replication.

EXPLORATORY EVIDENCE

Small or early studies used to generate and illustrate an idea. They should not become universal rules.

KGM ORIGINAL FINDING

Local work reported transparently, with its preliminary status and study boundaries kept visible.

KGM REPORTING RULE

Describe what was studied, identify the evidence stage and keep the limitations beside the conclusion. A crowded congress programme makes this discipline more important, not less.

Before the answer, read the study

A result belongs to a group of people, a design and a measurement. Before applying it to a child, walk through five equal questions.

1

WHO?

Who took part - children or adults, recreational or elite participants, and how many?

2

DESIGN?

Did researchers observe one moment, follow people over time, compare groups or assign an intervention?

3

MEASURE?

Did they measure activity, a movement skill, force, muscle thickness, success rate - or something else?

4

RESULT?

What actually changed, differed or was associated? A non-significant result is not proof that nothing happened.

5

CLAIM?

What can reasonably be said about this group and this measurement - and what remains unknown?

The Claim Ladder. WHO? - DESIGN? - MEASURE? - RESULT? - CLAIM? The questions keep a conclusion connected to the study that produced it; they are not a ranking of prestige.

FROM THE CONGRESS FLOOR

I presented a recreational-gymnastics poster and co-chaired two scientific sessions in Lausanne. The useful habit was to listen across the programme, then ask how far each conclusion could travel before bringing it home.

1

Children need more than "move more"

STUDY FINDING - ACTIVITY ACROSS THE
PRIMARY-SCHOOL YEARS

The Health Oriented Pedagogical Project, or HOPP, followed activity and sedentary behaviour among 2,123 children aged six to twelve in Norway. Children wore accelerometers at the hip, allowing researchers to examine patterns across several years^[2].

Moderate-to-vigorous activity declined by an average of about 2.2 minutes per day for each year, while sedentary time increased. Seven schools used an active-learning approach and two acted as controls, but the analysis did not find a statistically clear difference in their overall trajectories^[2].

That does not mean "active learning does not work". Schools were not randomly assigned, the groups differed at the start and children's lives outside school were not controlled. The supported claim is narrower: activity declined and sedentary behaviour rose in this cohort, and the study did not detect a clear difference in the overall trajectories of the two school groups.

PEER-REVIEWED LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE

A full peer-reviewed paper permits more scrutiny than a conference abstract, but its population and design still set limits.

STUDY BOUNDARY

Observed: activity and sedentary behaviour across several years in one Norwegian cohort.

Not established: a universal childhood trajectory or a definitive causal verdict on active learning.

CONFERENCE FINDING - MINUTES ARE NOT
MOVEMENT COMPETENCE

Nie, You and Zhang assessed 239 Year 1 pupils aged seven to eight on running, jumping, hopping, throwing, kicking and balance. Parents reported activity over the previous seven days. In this preliminary, cross-sectional Lausanne abstract, reported activity did not predict performance in the six skills after the analysis accounted for reported coordination difficulties^[3].

This does not show that activity is unimportant. It used parent reports over a short window, observed one group at one time and did not test movement teaching. Its useful point is that **time spent active and competence in particular movement tasks are not the same measurement.**

PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE EVIDENCE

A useful early signal from one cross-sectional sample, not a settled causal conclusion.

BROADER EVIDENCE - THE PARTS SHOULD NOT
BE COLLAPSED

Neither HOPP nor the Year 1 abstract measured a child's complete physical literacy, confidence, enjoyment or access to activities. Those ideas come from broader evidence. The World Health Organization recommends regular activity and less sedentary time, while its school guidance takes a whole-school view^[4,5]. A 2025 meta-analysis found that actual and perceived competence each had largely independent, small associations with physical activity^[6]. A 2024 review found promising but inconsistent results from school-based physical-literacy programmes^[7].

BROADER PEER-REVIEWED AND POLICY EVIDENCE

Activity, measured competence and perceived competence are related, but one should not stand in for the others.

Expert Lens - Professor Asgeir Mamen



Professor Asgeir Mamen, HOPP researcher and Professor of Physical Activity and Health at Kristiania University College.
PORTRAIT COURTESY OF PROFESSOR ASGEIR MAMEN.

Professor Asgeir Mamen is Professor of Physical Activity and Health in the Department of Health and Exercise at Kristiania University College. He is a HOPP researcher and co-author of the longitudinal paper discussed here^[2,9].

He holds a master's degree in physiology from the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences and a PhD from the University of Bergen; his doctoral work concerned physical training among people with substance dependence and additional mental distress^[9,10].

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

His answers bring decades of research and congress experience into a practical family conversation about opportunity, enjoyment and mastery.

WHAT CAN FAMILIES HELP CREATE?

"Parents should focus on creating possibilities for their children to be active. That includes time (to be active), space (where they can be active), equipment (what they need to do the activities) and social factors (community, friendship, challenges from peers)."^[8]

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE SETTING?

"A place to be - to act - is decisive."^[8]

WHAT SHOULD REMAIN CENTRAL?

"Parents should focus primarily on their children's enjoyment and mastering of activities/skills."^[8]

KGM EDITORIAL INTERPRETATION - MAKING OPPORTUNITY FINDABLE

KGM EDITORIAL INTERPRETATION

For KGM, opportunity begins before a child enters a gym, playground or class. Families need to discover what activities exist, where they happen and how a child can enter them. Time, space, equipment, community and a welcoming route in can determine whether the instruction to "move more" becomes possible.

Gymnastics can be one useful opportunity when it is enjoyable, appropriately taught and accessible. That is KGM's family-facing interpretation of the wider evidence and Professor Mamen's perspective - not a finding produced by HOPP, and not proof that gymnastics is necessary for every child.

SIGNAL 1 - EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Keep separate: HOPP tracked activity over time; Abstract 1168 measured six movement skills at one time; wider literature addresses competence and physical literacy; Professor Mamen interprets opportunity; KGM translates those ideas for families. None measured the complete chain.

What this does not establish: that active learning is ineffective, that activity is unrelated to skill, or that gymnastics prevents sedentary behaviour.

2

Stronger does not simply mean bigger

STRENGTH, APPEARANCE AND MEASURED THICKNESS ARE DIFFERENT

Strength describes the capacity to produce force. **Muscle thickness** is a structural measurement made at a defined site. **Visible muscle size** is an appearance. They can be related, but they are not interchangeable.

Force also depends on coordination, understanding the task and how the nervous system recruits muscles. A young person may improve in a strength test without looking different, and ultrasound at a few muscle sites cannot describe the whole body.

Four different questions

Force: what can the body produce in this test?

Measured thickness: what did ultrasound show at these sites?

Appearance: what does the body look like?

Individual explanation: why did this child change?

WHAT THE LAUSANNE TRIAL REPORTED

Komm and colleagues randomly assigned 68 previously untrained boys to resistance training or an active-control group. Thirty-nine were classified as prepubertal and 29 as pubertal. The programme lasted nine weeks, with two supervised sessions each week^[11].

The training group improved more in absolute peak force during an isometric mid-thigh pull - pulling as hard as possible against an immovable bar. Researchers did not detect a statistically clear training-related change in the thickness of three measured thigh-muscle sites. They also found no clear evidence that the response differed between the two maturity groups^[11].

This does not mean that young people cannot increase muscle size, that puberty is irrelevant or that every kind of strength improved. It describes one programme, one force test, three ultrasound sites and previously untrained boys. The force result expressed relative to body mass was not statistically clear, which is another reason to keep the family conclusion narrow.

RANDOMIZED CONFERENCE EVIDENCE

Random assignment strengthens the intervention test within this sample. The result was still available only as a conference abstract at drafting, and the population, duration and measurements remain firm boundaries.

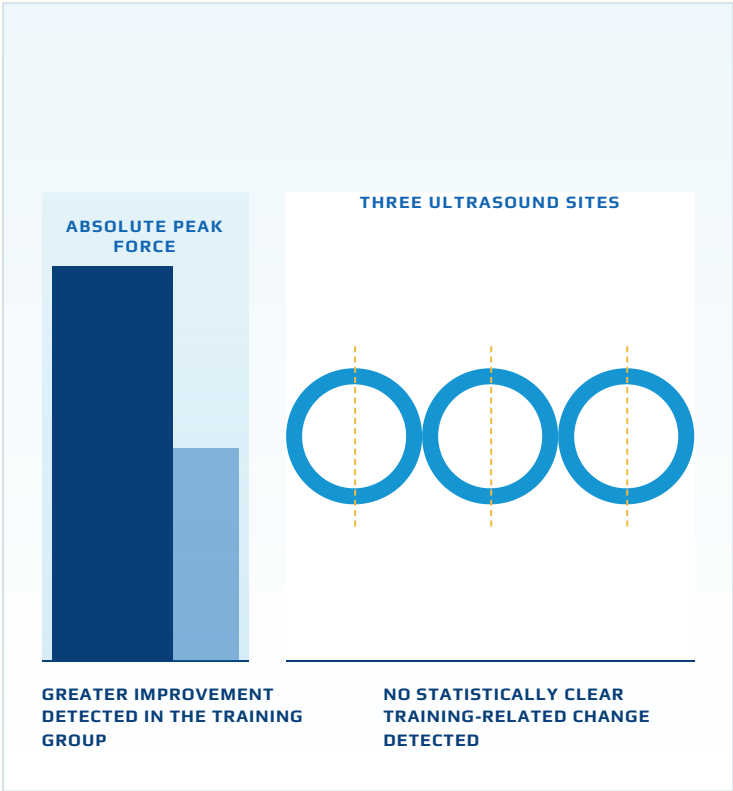
WHAT ESTABLISHED GUIDANCE ADDS

The broader evidence is more mature. The American Academy of Pediatrics says appropriately designed and supervised resistance training can form part of children's and adolescents' physical development, and that prepubertal strength gains are commonly driven substantially by neurological adaptation rather than muscle enlargement alone^[12].

A 2025 scoping review also found that studies of muscle morphology in children and adolescents remain limited and varied^[13].

This context supports the general distinction between strength and size. It does not supply an individual explanation for one child.

Force and measured thickness



Force and measured thickness. The nine-week trial detected a greater improvement in absolute isometric peak force in the training group, but no statistically clear training-related change at three measured thigh-muscle sites. Previously untrained boys; conference-abstract evidence^[11].

WHY THIS MATTERS IN GYMNASTICS

Gymnastics asks children to create and control force when they support, hang, climb, jump, land and hold shapes. A child may become more capable before looking different. Practice, coordination, confidence, growth and muscular or neural changes may all contribute.

The family lesson is interpretive, not a programme to copy: **capability can improve without a matching visible change, and appearance is a poor substitute for a properly chosen measure.**

Strength is something the body can do. Muscle size is only one part of how it does it.

SIGNAL 2 - EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Keep separate: performance on one force test; ultrasound thickness at three sites; visible appearance; and the explanation for an individual child.

What this does not establish: that all strength gains are neural, that young people do not increase muscle size, that maturity never matters, or that the result applies to girls, trained gymnasts or longer programmes.

HEALTH AND TRAINING NOTICE

This Feature explains research; it does not provide an individual exercise or medical programme. Children's training should suit their age, experience, health and development, and be supervised by appropriately qualified professionals. Families with pain, injury or health concerns should seek advice from an appropriate healthcare professional.

3

New science asks how skills adapt

FROM THE ECSS PROGRAMME TO A WIDER SCIENTIFIC QUESTION

Consistency matters in gymnastics. A gymnast must find the bar, arrive in a controlled handstand and reproduce safe shapes. But a consistent **outcome** does not require every joint to move in precisely the same way on every repetition.

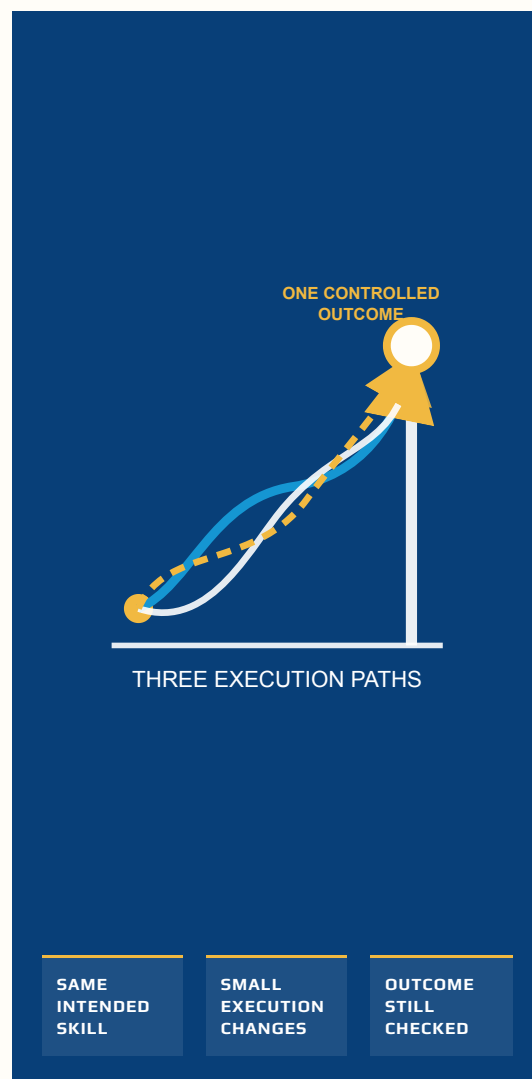
Movement scientists use *variability* for differences across repeated performances. A 2022 scoping review separated three ideas^[14]:

Strategy - the overall way of solving the task.

Execution - small adjustments within that strategy.

Outcome - the result achieved.

A stable outcome may coexist with small execution adjustments. More variability is not automatically better: it may reflect useful adaptation, an unsettled skill or loss of the intended result. Ecological-dynamics research adds that skill develops through the relationship between the individual, task and environment; practice must remain representative, purposeful and suitable for the athlete^[15]. This mature literature carries the broader interpretation. A small Lausanne abstract, discussed on the next page, is a gymnastics-specific example of that question - not the evidence base for a universal coaching rule.



Stable outcome, adaptable route. Three subtly different movement paths can lead towards one controlled handstand outcome. This concept diagram is not motion capture from the Lausanne study, and "different" is not automatically "better"^[14].

The goal is not random movement. It is a reliable skill that can cope with small changes.

One exploratory example from Lausanne

Murayama's exploratory Lausanne abstract examined five female university gymnasts performing kip-to-handstands on uneven bars. They practised across several research-controlled conditions. Success meant reaching a stable handstand, and two experienced coaches also made qualitative judgements about adaptability and the variety of solutions used^[16].

The abstract reported improved success after the practice period and interpreted the pattern as greater situational adaptability and solution diversity^[16]. It is an interesting gymnastics-specific example, not proof of a universal training principle. Five university gymnasts cannot represent children, beginners or the sport as a whole. The abstract reported no control group, inferential statistics or motion-capture evidence showing exactly how movement changed. The responsible family-facing conclusion is therefore qualitative: the study illustrates a question about adaptability that requires larger and more detailed research.

EXPLORATORY CONFERENCE EVIDENCE

An idea-generating gymnastics example involving five university gymnasts. The broader concept comes from the peer-reviewed variability and ecological-dynamics literature, not from Abstract 967 alone.

FUNCTIONAL - OR SIMPLY DIFFERENT?

An experienced coach may allow small adjustments for the gymnast's body, timing and information in the moment while keeping the skill recognisable, controlled and safe. Children grow; grip, speed and confidence change. A robust skill may need organisation and adaptability.

POSSIBLY FUNCTIONAL

An adjustment helps the gymnast reach the intended outcome safely and effectively.

POSSIBLY DYSFUNCTIONAL

The difference reduces control, moves away from the intended technique or increases risk.

THE LIMIT

Variation alone cannot decide. Outcome, context, technique, safety and the individual gymnast all matter.

For families, the useful question is not whether two repetitions look perfectly identical. It is whether the gymnast still solves the task safely, effectively and with appropriate control. The coach must answer that in the full context of the skill.

SIGNAL 3 - EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Keep separate: consistency of outcome, variability of execution and random or unsafe difference.

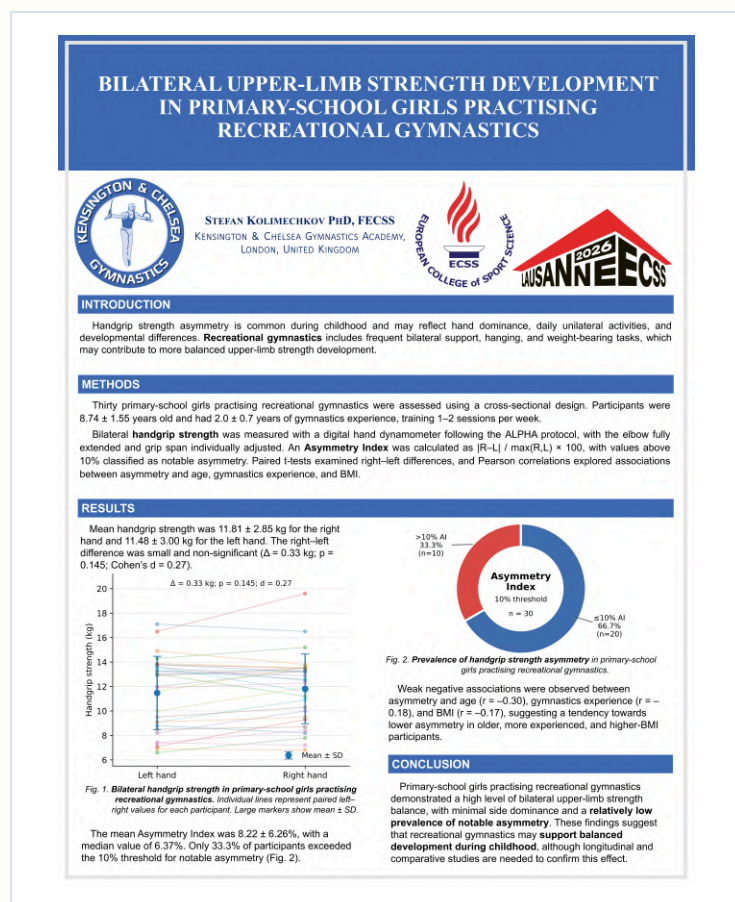
What this does not establish: that variation is always beneficial, that the five-gymnast result applies to children or every skill, or that families should recreate the study's practice conditions.

SKILLS SAFETY NOTICE

Gymnastics skills and apparatus must be taught and managed by appropriately qualified coaches in a suitable, supervised environment. This article explains a research idea; it is not an instruction to change equipment or practise skills independently.

4

One local poster. One limited claim.



Poster record. The ECSS Lausanne 2026 poster examined bilateral handgrip strength in 30 primary-school girls practising recreational gymnastics. It is a cross-sectional KGM original finding with no non-gymnastics comparison group and cannot establish cause^[17].

THE SAME RULES APPLY TO OUR OWN RESEARCH

In Lausanne, I presented *Bilateral Upper-Limb Strength Development in Primary-School Girls Practising Recreational Gymnastics*. The cross-sectional study involved 30 girls, with an average age just under nine, who attended recreational gymnastics once or twice each week^[17].

Right and left handgrip strength were measured using an established field-testing approach^[18]. The group average showed only a small difference between sides, while individual children still varied. The published congress abstract provides the detailed statistics^[17].

The study had no non-gymnastics comparison group and did not follow the girls over time. It cannot show that gymnastics caused the average pattern. Handgrip is one measure, not a complete account of upper-limb strength, whole-body strength or gymnastics ability. A threshold used in the poster was a study rule, not a diagnosis; interpretation of upper-limb differences varies with the comparison, movement and population^[19].

TRANSPARENCY NOTE - KGM ORIGINAL FINDING

This study was conducted through Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy and presented by the author of this Feature. It receives the same claim limits as the independent studies discussed here.

KGM ORIGINAL CONFERENCE EVIDENCE

Preliminary, cross-sectional poster evidence from one recreational setting; not yet a full peer-reviewed article. Detailed statistics are available in the conference abstract and poster.

Four signals, four kinds of confidence

The four signals are not an evidence leaderboard. Each answers a different question.

SIGNAL 4 - EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Keep separate: a group mean, an individual difference and a causal explanation. **What this does not establish:** that gymnastics produced the pattern, that a study threshold diagnoses a child, or that handgrip represents all upper-limb function.

SIGNAL	VISIBLE STUDY-STATUS LABEL	WHAT IT CAN SUPPORT	WHERE THE CLAIM STOPS
1 - Activity over time	PEER-REVIEWED LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE	Describes change across years in the HOPP cohort.	Does not establish a universal trajectory or a definitive causal verdict on active learning.
2 - Strength intervention	RANDOMIZED CONFERENCE EVIDENCE	Tests one nine-week programme within the studied sample.	Does not explain every strength gain or generalise to girls, trained gymnasts or longer programmes.
3 - Uneven-bars example	EXPLORATORY CONFERENCE EVIDENCE	Generates and illustrates an adaptability idea inside gymnastics.	Does not establish a coaching rule.
4 - Girls' handgrip poster	KGM ORIGINAL CONFERENCE EVIDENCE	Reports one local group openly and transparently.	Does not establish cause or diagnose an individual child.

SIGNAL 1 ALSO CONTAINS A SEPARATE EARLY SIGNAL

The Year 1 movement-skills abstract carries its own label - **PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE EVIDENCE** - within Signal 1. It helps separate reported activity from measured competence but cannot establish cause.

THE READING PRINCIPLE

Publication stage is not a stamp saying "true" or "false". Confidence comes from matching the conclusion to the population, design, measure and scrutiny available.

KEEP THE STATUS VISIBLE

A peer-reviewed longitudinal study, a randomized conference trial, an exploratory abstract and a KGM original poster do not become equivalent because they share a congress programme. The label is part of the finding.

From Nice 1996 to Lausanne 2026

31 congresses - 30 years of European sport science

The European College of Sport Science says its Annual Congress has been organised since the College's inauguration in 1995. The first Annual Congress was held in Nice in 1996; Lausanne 2026 was the 31st edition^[24].

Each year, a location is selected through a bidding process. ECSS describes the Congress as one of the world's leading sport-science events and says it welcomes approximately 3,000 international participants each year across lectures, symposia, oral presentations, workshops and posters^[24]. Those descriptions belong to ECSS; this chronology records the completed congresses.

HISTORICAL RECORD

Edition numbers, places and years follow the live official ECSS congress history checked on 9 September 2026.

1ST	1996	 Nice	9TH	2004	 Clermont-Ferrand
2ND	1997	 Copenhagen	10TH	2005	 Belgrade
3RD	1998	 Manchester	11TH	2006	 Lausanne
4TH	1999	 Rome	12TH	2007	 Jyväskylä
5TH	2000	 Jyväskylä	13TH	2008	 Estoril
6TH	2001	 Cologne	14TH	2009	 Oslo
7TH	2002	 Athens	15TH	2010	 Antalya
8TH	2003	 Salzburg	16TH	2011	 Liverpool

ECSS congress history, part one. The first sixteen completed Annual Congresses, from Nice 1996 to Liverpool 2011.

Seventeen to thirty-one

17TH	2012	 Brussels	25TH	2020	 Virtual
18TH	2013	 Barcelona	26TH	2021	 Virtual
19TH	2014	 Amsterdam	27TH	2022	 Seville
20TH	2015	 Malmö	28TH	2023	 Paris
21ST	2016	 Vienna	29TH	2024	 Glasgow
22ND	2017	 MetropolisRuhr	30TH	2025	 Rimini
23RD	2018	 Dublin	31ST	2026	 Lausanne
24TH	2019	 Prague			

Lausanne appears twice: 2006 and 2026.	Jyväskylä appears twice: 2000 and 2007.
2020 and 2021: due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both Annual Congresses were moved online and held virtually.	What comes next: the next Annual Congresses are scheduled for Manchester 2027 and Copenhagen 2028.

THREE DECADES SEEN FROM INSIDE ECSS

Professor Asgeir Mamen has attended every ECSS Annual Congress from Nice 1996 through Lausanne 2026. In his view, the College now knows far more about the benefits of physical activity, while important questions remain about the lower and upper limits of activity and sedentary time for health^[8]. His perspective captures what a long-running congress can do: accumulate knowledge while making the next uncertainty more precise.

ECSS congress history, completed. All 31 completed ECSS Annual Congresses from Nice 1996 to Lausanne 2026, using official ECSS edition numbers and English city names^[24]. National flags identify physical host countries; a globe marks each virtual edition.

What families can carry home

1 - LOOK BEYOND THE TOTAL MINUTES

Activity matters, but families can also ask: Did the child have a chance to learn? Was the activity enjoyable? Did they feel able to join in? Could the family find and reach the opportunity? These questions do not replace activity guidance; they help make movement possible and meaningful.

2 - NOTICE CAPABILITY, NOT APPEARANCE

A child can become stronger or more skilful without looking different. Strength, muscle thickness, technique and confidence are not interchangeable. A more useful conversation with a coach concerns what the child can now do with appropriate control and what they are ready to learn next.

3 - ASK WHETHER A SKILL REMAINS DEPENDABLE

Small adjustments may help a gymnast cope with timing, growth and normal differences between repetitions. The aim is not variation for its own sake. It is a safe, effective skill that remains dependable.

4 - READ THE EVIDENCE LABEL

Ask whether the source is a peer-reviewed paper, conference abstract, exploratory study or KGM original finding. Then use the Claim Ladder: **WHO? - DESIGN? - MEASURE? - RESULT? - CLAIM?**

Activity

Minutes matter, but they are not the whole child.

Strength

Capability is not the same as visible size.

Skill

Consistency can include safe adaptation.

Evidence

A useful conclusion keeps its limits attached.



Dr Stefan Kolimechkov and Professor Sebastian Ludyga at the chair's desk for the oral session *Adolescents/Children II* at ECSS Lausanne 2026.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

SCIENTIFIC SERVICE

SCIENTIFIC SERVICE

In Lausanne, I co-chaired the podium session *Adolescents/Children II* with Professor Sebastian Ludyga of the University of Basel^[25] and the poster session *Health and Fitness / Ageing II* with Mikio Hiura of Aomori University.

Chairing is scientific service: welcoming presenters, keeping a session moving, protecting time for questions and helping an audience examine methods and conclusions. Listening closely across a full session is also part of how useful questions travel from an international congress back to family practice.

Presenting and serving at ECSS

My ECSS membership began in 2017^[23]. The detailed record starts with my first congress presentation in 2019 and gives the full title and format of every presentation I delivered, together with each scientific-session chair role. The vertical line keeps all eight congress years visible at a glance.

EIGHT CONGRESS YEARS

2019 - PRAGUE

First ECSS presentation

2020 - VIRTUAL

Research presented online

2021 - VIRTUAL

Research presented online

2022 - SEVILLE

Presentation and first chair role

2023 - PARIS

Poster presentation

2024 - GLASGOW

Podium presentation, chairing and Fellowship

2025 - RIMINI

Poster presentation and chairing

2026 - LAUSANNE

Poster presentation and chairing

2019 - PRAGUE

First ECSS presentation

Podium presentation

Body composition and nutrient intake of Olympic and elite rhythmic gymnasts.



Stefan Kolimechkov delivering his first ECSS presentation at ECSS Prague 2019.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

2020 - VIRTUAL

Research presented online

Virtual presentation

Artistic gymnastics improves health-related biomarkers at primary school age.

2021 - VIRTUAL

Research presented online

Virtual presentation

Relative handgrip strength is a better indicator than absolute handgrip strength for the assessment of health-related musculoskeletal fitness in children.

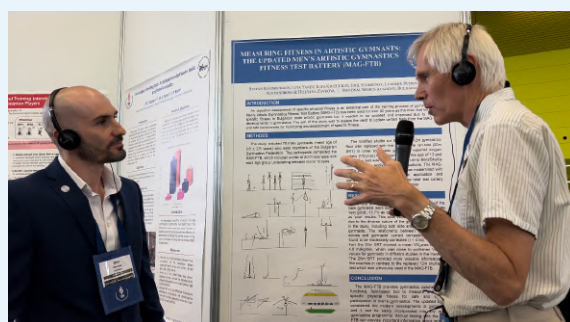
2022 - SEVILLE

Presentation and first chair role

Poster presentation

Measuring fitness in artistic gymnasts: The updated men's artistic gymnastics fitness test battery (MAG-FTB).

Scientific service: chaired the podium session *Health and Fitness in Children*.



Professor Asgeir Mamen, session chair, discussing Stefan Kolimechkov's gymnastics research during the poster session at ECSS Seville 2022.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

A professional connection begins

Professor Mamen chaired the poster session in which I presented the MAG-FTB research. We first engaged there and have met at every annual ECSS Congress since - Paris, Glasgow, Rimini and Lausanne - continuing conversations that connect research, teaching, physical activity and health^[8,23].

The photograph records two complementary roles at work: presenting a study and chairing the scientific discussion around it.

The ECSS line continues



Stefan Kolimechkov discussing his poster at ECSS Paris 2023.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

2023 - Paris

Poster presentation

Effects of microcurrent therapy with resistance exercises on strength, functional capacity and muscle thickness in middle-aged adults: A pilot study.



Stefan Kolimechkov delivering his podium presentation at ECSS Glasgow 2024.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

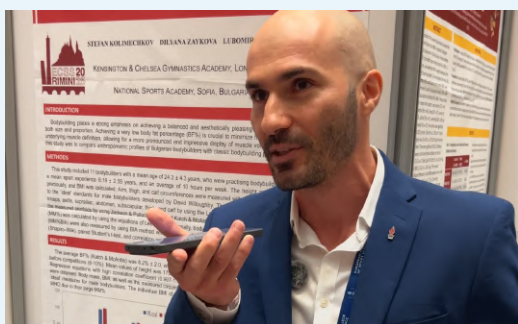
2024 - Glasgow

Podium presentation

Effects of microcurrent therapy added to physical exercise on body composition, performance, and muscle soreness: A meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials.

Scientific service: chaired the podium session *Physical Education and Pedagogics / Teachers* and the poster session *Children, Talents and Young Athletes*.

ECSS Fellowship: recognised as an ECSS Fellow^[23,26].



Stefan Kolimechkov discussing his poster at ECSS Rimini 2025.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

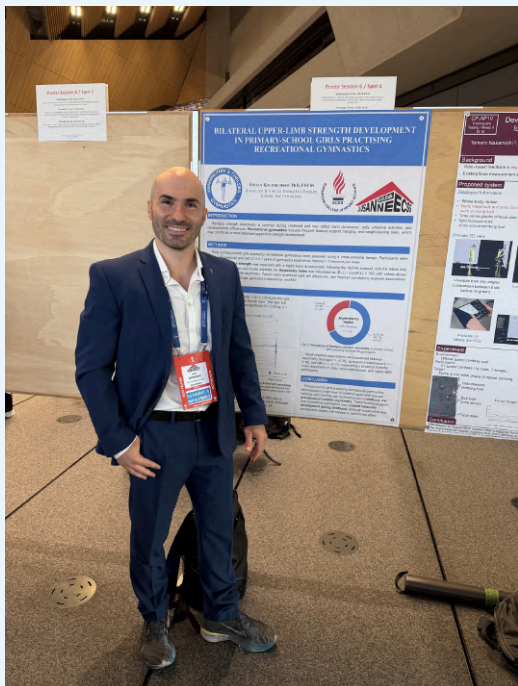
2025 - Rimini

Poster presentation

Anthropometric profiles and body composition assessment in Bulgarian bodybuilders.

Scientific service: chaired the podium session *Physical Education II* and the poster session *Ageing II*.

Lausanne 2026



Stefan Kolimechkov with his gymnastics research poster at ECSS Lausanne 2026.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE.

2026 - Lausanne

Poster presentation

Bilateral upper-limb strength development in primary-school girls practising recreational gymnastics.^[17]

Scientific service: chaired the podium session *Adolescents/Children II* and the poster session *Health and Fitness / Ageing II*.

What comes home

The value of bringing science from Lausanne to London is not the number of abstracts collected. It is learning to carry each conclusion with its limits still attached.

Across the four signals, the lessons are modest. Activity and movement competence answer different questions. Strength can improve without a matching change in measured muscle thickness. A dependable skill can include adaptable execution. A local poster can contribute when its preliminary status remains visible.

Back in London, every decision concerns a particular child in a particular week. **No abstract can know that child completely.** Research can still help the adults around them notice more, assume less and ask better questions.

Carry home only what the evidence can support.

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SOURCE TYPES REMAIN VISIBLE Peer-reviewed papers, individually authored conference abstracts, the complete Book of Abstracts, professional interpretation, official congress records and KGM original findings are cited according to their actual form.

NEXT RESEARCH STAGE The separately reported boys' and girls' conference findings, together with feedback received at both congresses, are intended to inform a combined manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Any combined interpretation belongs to that later analysis and peer-review process.

Foundations

Gymnastics Anatomy

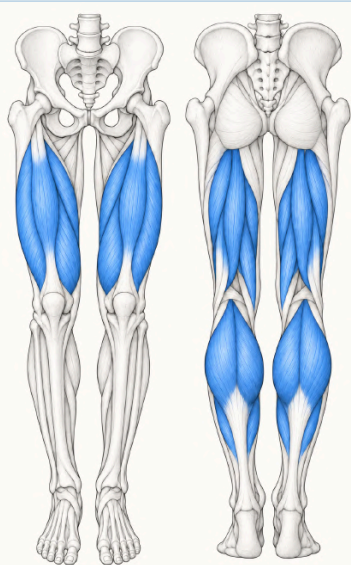
Legs for Jumping and Landing

How the thigh and calf muscles help children produce force, control movement and return to the floor

EVIDENCE STATUS

ESTABLISHED ANATOMY

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION



THE LOWER-LIMB SYSTEM

The thigh and calf muscles work across the hip, knee and ankle as parts of one connected system.

“The same muscle group may help produce movement, control movement or hold a position.”

LONDON LENS

In London, a child may meet jumping and landing in school PE, a leisure-centre class and a dedicated gymnastics setting. The equipment, space, task and coaching context can differ, even when the movement has the same everyday name.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Think in systems. The thigh and calf muscles are important parts of jumping and landing, but they do not work alone.

A gymnast bends, pushes, leaves the floor and comes back to a surface—sometimes to finish, sometimes to continue into another movement. The whole journey may last only a moment, yet it asks the body to organise many parts at once.

In Issue 4, we explored the hip and pelvis: the strong central region that connects the trunk and legs. Now we travel farther down the lower limb, meeting three familiar muscle groups—the quadriceps at the front of the thigh, the hamstrings at the back and the calf complex below the knee.

These groups matter, but none is *the* jumping muscle or *the* landing muscle. A jump also involves the trunk, hips, knees and ankles, as well as the arms, balance, timing, task and surface. A landing is not performed by one body part, either. It is shared work, organised for a particular moment.

That matters for families because visible movement can tempt us into quick conclusions. A bent knee does not tell us that one muscle is “off”. A quiet landing is not automatically a safe one. A powerful jump does not reveal which structure deserves all the credit. Anatomy gives us names and relationships; it does not turn a photograph, a sound or one attempt into a diagnosis.

This chapter follows one clear route: first the structures, then the actions, then the evidence—and always the limits of what that evidence can tell us.

Leaving the Floor—and Returning to It

EVIDENCE STATUS

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

LEAVE THE SURFACE

FLIGHT

RETURN TO A SURFACE

Take-off and landing belong to the same movement journey, but they are not mirror images.

Before take-off, the body prepares and produces enough force against a surface to change its motion. During flight, the gymnast has no support from the floor. On return, the body meets a surface again and must manage another rapid change in motion. If the gymnast rebounds immediately, contact becomes both an arrival and the beginning of the next departure.

The muscles do not operate like three separate light switches—thigh front, thigh back, then calf. Their contributions overlap. A muscle group may help create movement in one phase, regulate movement in another and help steady a position at the end. What it can contribute also depends on the position of the joints it crosses.

This is why a landing should not be reduced to a still image. A photograph can show body shape at one instant, but not the approach, the speed, the surface, the forces, the timing or what happens next. The same visible shape may appear in different tasks for different reasons.

The specific gymnastics studies behind this framing—and the limits of applying them to children—are introduced on folios 31, 39 and 41.

ONE JOURNEY, DIFFERENT DEMANDS

Leave the surface → **flight** → **return to a surface**

- **Leave:** the body produces force to change motion.
- **Flight:** the gymnast reorganises without support from the floor.
- **Return:** the body manages contact and the change in motion.
- **Rebound:** return and take-off are linked without a settled finish.

MOVEMENT LENS

Take-off The leg joints do not fire like separate switches. They contribute within one timed movement.

Landing A landing is a change in motion, not a photograph. What happened before contact matters too.

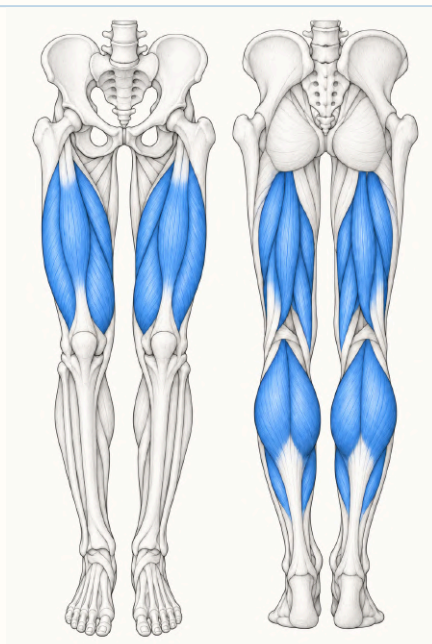
Rebound A rebound asks the body to manage contact and prepare to leave the surface again. That is not the same task as finishing and holding.

“Anatomy names the structures. The task helps explain what they may be doing.”

One Connected Lower-Limb System

EVIDENCE STATUS

ESTABLISHED ANATOMY



THE LOWER-LIMB SYSTEM

The thigh and calf muscles work across the hip, knee and ankle as parts of one connected system.

The lower limb is connected by bones, joints, muscles and tendons. The thigh bone—the femur—meets the pelvis at the hip and the lower leg at the knee. Below the knee, the tibia and fibula continue towards the ankle. Muscles cross one joint or more, and tendons connect muscle to bone so that muscle force can be transmitted through the system.

At the front of the thigh, the four-part quadriceps group contributes to straightening the knee. One part, rectus femoris, also crosses the hip^[1]. At the back of the thigh, the hamstrings include muscles that cross both hip and knee, as well as one part—the short head of biceps femoris—that crosses the knee but not the hip^[2]. In the calf, gastrocnemius crosses the knee and ankle, while the deeper soleus crosses the ankle^[3].

Those relationships create possibilities, not fixed scripts. Saying that a muscle *can contribute* to a joint action does not tell us that it acted alone, how strongly it acted or whether the movement was good. Researchers need specific measurements to investigate those questions, and even then each measurement reveals only part of the event.

The word *contract* can also mislead. In everyday speech it sounds like “get shorter”, but a muscle can produce force while shortening, while lengthening or while changing very little in length^[4]. That difference becomes especially useful when we compare leaving a surface with returning to one.

WORD CHECK

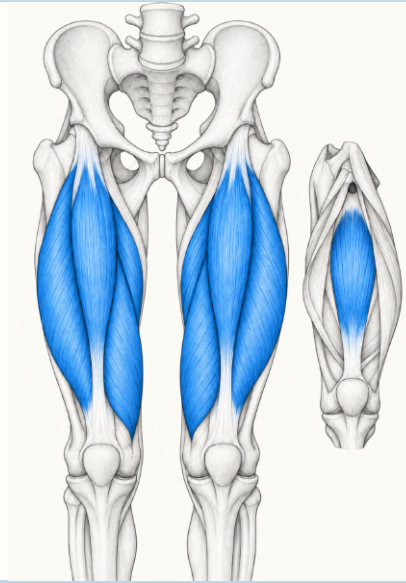
- **Muscle:** tissue that produces force.
- **Tendon:** strong connective tissue that transmits muscle force to bone.
- **Joint action:** a description of movement at a joint—not a verdict about one muscle or the quality of a skill.

SYSTEM RULE

Never infer a complete movement from one anatomical label. “Knee extension”, for example, names a joint action; it does not mean that the quadriceps acted alone.

Muscle Spotlight: The Quadriceps

EVIDENCE STATUS **ESTABLISHED ANATOMY**



THE QUADRICEPS

The quadriceps group has four parts. All contribute to knee extension; rectus femoris also crosses the hip.

The quadriceps occupy the front of the thigh. Their name means “four heads”, and the group contains four distinct muscles: rectus femoris, vastus lateralis, vastus medialis and vastus intermedius^[1].

Three of them—the vasti—begin on the femur and cross the knee. Rectus femoris crosses both the hip and knee. All four join into a common tendon above the kneecap, or patella, and their force continues through the patellar tendon towards the tibia^[1].

Together, the quadriceps contribute to knee extension: the action that straightens the knee. Because rectus femoris also crosses the hip, its relationship to movement is not identical to that of the three vasti. This is one reason it is better to think of a muscle’s contribution in context than to assign the entire group one permanent job.

In gymnastics, knee extension may be visible when a child rises from a bent position, pushes away from a surface or reaches a straighter leg shape. The quadriceps can also produce force while the knee is bending, helping to control the change rather than simply causing the joint to straighten.

FOUR PARTS, ONE GROUP

- **Rectus femoris:** at the front of the thigh; crosses hip and knee.
- **Vastus lateralis:** on the outer side of the thigh; crosses the knee.
- **Vastus medialis:** on the inner side of the thigh; crosses the knee.
- **Vastus intermedius:** lies deep to rectus femoris; crosses the knee.

These names describe anatomy. They are not four separate buttons that a child or coach switches on independently.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

The front of the thigh can help straighten the knee and can also help control knee bending. The task and phase change the job.

The Front of the Thigh in Motion

EVIDENCE STATUS

ESTABLISHED ANATOMY

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE

Watch the knee across a jump and its movement may reverse quickly. During part of take-off, the knee can move towards a straighter position. On return, it often bends. The quadriceps can contribute in both situations—but not in exactly the same way.

When knee extension helps produce take-off, the quadriceps may produce force while shortening. When the knee bends after contact, they may still produce force while lengthening, helping to control that change. “The knee is bending” therefore does not mean “the quadriceps have switched off”.

Gymnastics research supports this wider view while also showing why it needs limits. A recent scoping review found that landing studies used different ages, levels, tasks and measurements; no one pattern covered every gymnast or every landing^[5]. In one small laboratory study, trained prepubertal gymnasts and untrained girls completed prescribed drop landings from different heights. The measured joint motion, forces and selected muscle activity changed with the task and the participants’ training background^[6].

That study helps us see possibilities. It does not tell a recreational child how far to bend, how to arrange every joint or how to land every skill. A drop from a set height in a laboratory is not the same as a jump learned and supervised in an ordinary gymnastics class.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“The quadriceps make the jump.”

The quadriceps can contribute strongly at the knee, but take-off is shared across the body. The hips, ankles, trunk, arms, timing and surface are also part of the movement.

MOVEMENT LENS

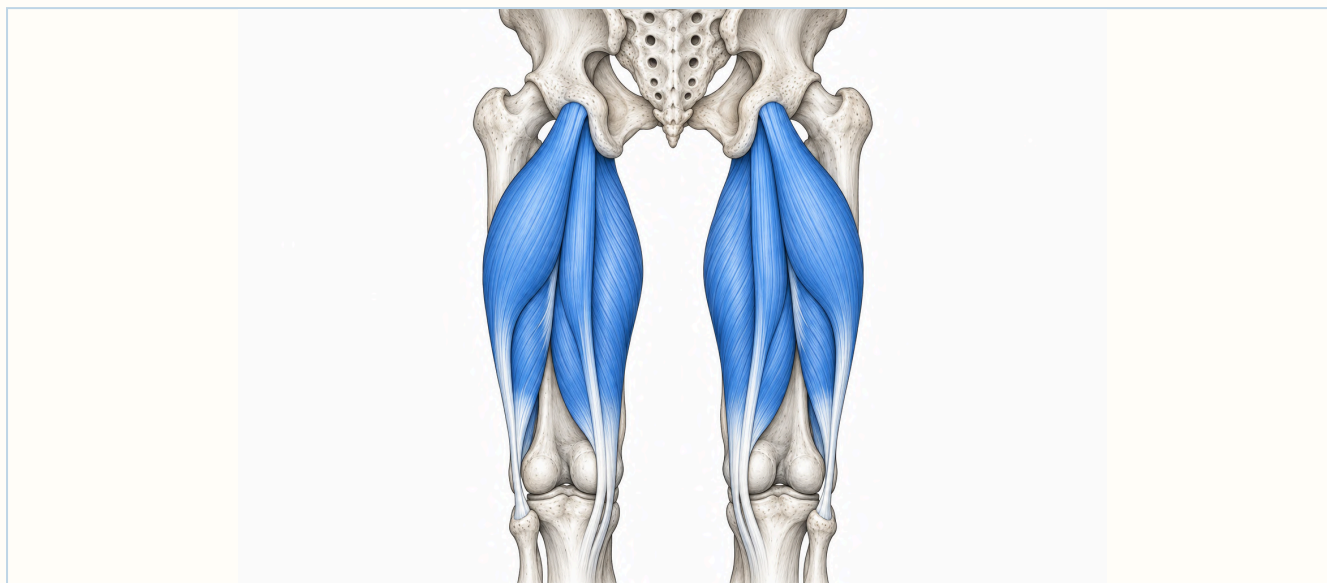
A muscle may be active while the joint moves in the direction normally associated with that muscle—or while the joint moves the other way and the muscle helps control the change.

RESEARCH BOUNDARY

Gymnastics-specific does not mean universal. The participants, task, surface and measurements must always travel with the finding.

Muscle Spotlight: The Hamstrings

EVIDENCE STATUS **ESTABLISHED ANATOMY**



THE HAMSTRINGS

The hamstrings occupy the back of the thigh. Most cross the hip and knee; the biceps femoris short head crosses the knee only.

The hamstrings occupy the back of the thigh. The group includes semitendinosus, semimembranosus and biceps femoris, which has a long head and a short head^[2].

Most of this group crosses both the hip and knee. These parts can contribute to hip extension—the thigh moving backwards relative to the pelvis—and knee flexion, or bending the knee. The biceps femoris short head is the exception: it begins on the femur and crosses the knee, but not the hip^[2].

That exception matters. It prevents an easy but inaccurate sentence such as “all hamstrings extend the hip”. It also reminds us that a group name can hide meaningful anatomical differences.

Because much of the hamstring group crosses two joints, its length and mechanical situation change with both hip and knee position. A gymnast’s hip may be flexing while the knee is extending, or the joints may change together. The group’s contribution cannot be understood by looking at the knee alone.

In jumping and landing, the hamstrings belong to a larger network that includes the quadriceps, gluteal muscles, calf muscles and trunk. Their role can overlap with the work of other groups. Anatomy makes that possible; the specific movement and its timing help determine what actually happens.

NAME CHECK

- **Semitendinosus**
- **Semimembranosus**
- **Biceps femoris, long head**
- **Biceps femoris, short head**

PARENT TAKEAWAY

The back of the thigh is not an “opposite team”. Its contribution can overlap with the quadriceps and changes with position.

More Than Knee Benders

EVIDENCE STATUS **TRANSFERRED EVIDENCE** **PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION**

It is tempting to place the quadriceps and hamstrings on opposite sides of a simple diagram and imagine that one group works only when the other rests. Human movement is more interesting than that.

The quadriceps and hamstrings can both contribute around the knee during the same phase of a landing. Their timing and level of activity may overlap, while their mechanical effects differ because they cross the joint from different directions. Much of the hamstring group also crosses the hip, connecting what happens at the back of the thigh with the position and motion of the pelvis.

One laboratory study measured hip and knee motion together with electrical activity from selected quadriceps and hamstring muscles during drop-jump landings^[7]. The study involved 50 female elite team-sport athletes, including 13 aged 16–18—not primary-school children or recreational gymnasts. It found associations between joint motion and patterns of measured muscle activity. Used carefully, that evidence helps explain why front- and back-of-thigh contributions can overlap and why one visible knee position cannot identify one muscle’s condition^[7].

It does *not* provide a home test. Electrical activity is measured with specialist equipment, and even that measurement does not reveal every aspect of force, coordination or movement quality. A photograph provides much less information.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Hamstrings only bend the knee.”

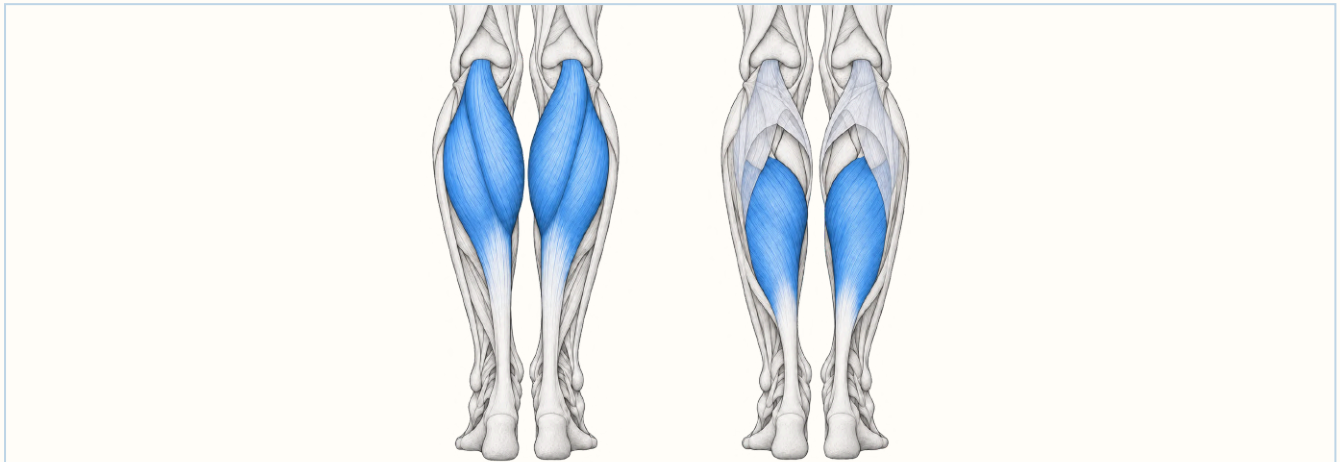
Most of the group also crosses the hip. In real movement, hip position, knee position, timing and the task all matter.

WHY THE LABEL MATTERS

Transferred evidence means that a study offers a useful mechanism or example from another population. It must not be presented as direct proof about primary-school recreational gymnasts.

“*Front and back do not mean ‘on’ and ‘off’. Their contributions can overlap.*”

Muscle Spotlight: The Calf Complex

EVIDENCE STATUS **ESTABLISHED ANATOMY**

THE CALF COMPLEX

Gastrocnemius lies over soleus. Together they contribute to plantarflexion and transmit force towards the heel through their shared tendon.

Below the knee, two large muscles form the main calf complex: gastrocnemius and soleus. Together they are also called the triceps surae^[3].

Gastrocnemius is the more superficial muscle—the one whose two heads create much of the familiar calf shape. It crosses both the knee and ankle. Soleus lies deeper. It crosses the ankle but not the knee^[3].

Both contribute to plantarflexion. That is the anatomical name for moving the top of the foot away from the shin, as happens when the heel rises relative to the lower leg. Yet “pointing the toes” is too narrow a description of the calf’s possible contribution. In a jump or rebound, plantarflexion can be part of producing force against a surface. On return, the calf muscles can also produce force while the ankle moves in the opposite direction.

The two muscles join into a strong shared tendon, commonly called the Achilles tendon, which transmits force towards the heel^[3]. That single relationship is all we need here. How the tendon stores and returns energy, how it is loaded and how injuries are managed belong to the next Anatomy chapter, where the feet and ankles can receive proper attention.

LAYER CHECK

- **Gastrocnemius:** superficial; two heads; crosses knee and ankle.
- **Soleus:** deeper; crosses the ankle.
- **Together:** contribute to plantarflexion and transmit force towards the heel through their shared tendon.

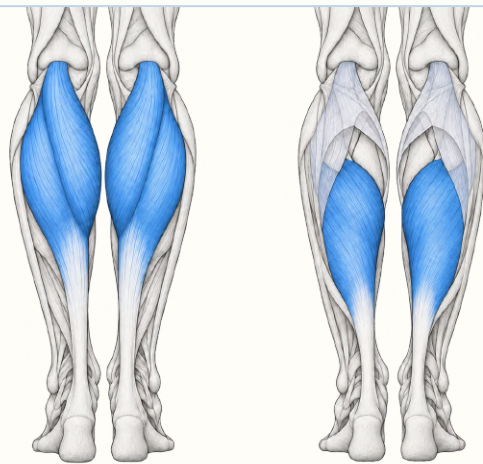
Deeper does not mean less important. It simply describes anatomical position.

More Than Pointing the Toes

EVIDENCE STATUS

ESTABLISHED ANATOMY

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE



THE CALF IN MOTION

The calf complex can contribute during take-off, return and rebound as part of a whole-body action.

A pointed foot shape is easy to see in gymnastics, but it is not the whole story of the calf. The same region can contribute while a child pushes away from the floor, meets the floor or changes rapidly from landing to take-off in a rebound.

The knee position matters, too. Gastrocnemius crosses the knee as well as the ankle, while soleus crosses only the ankle^[3]. This means the mechanical situation of the two muscles is not identical across every body shape. It would therefore be misleading to treat “the calves” as one simple lever that always performs the same job.

A study of 118 young female artistic gymnasts used a standardised drop jump to examine force-time profiles across different competitive contexts^[8]. The measured profiles differed between groups. That is useful evidence that rebound strategies are not identical—but it is not a ranking for families, and it does not prescribe how a recreational child should rebound^[8].

A rebound has a particular demand: the body must manage contact while preparing to leave the surface again. A controlled landing that finishes and holds has a different purpose. The calf complex can contribute in both, but the timing and wider body pattern need not be the same.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Calves are only for pointing the toes.”

Pointed shape is one visible outcome. Calf muscles also contribute to ankle force and control during take-off, return and rebound as part of a whole-body action.

MOVEMENT LENS — REBOUND

A rebound is neither “just a landing” nor “just another jump”. Contact links the two, and the body organises itself for what comes next.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Calf muscles do more than create a pointed shape. They contribute to ankle force and control within a whole-body action.

NEXT ISSUE BOUNDARY

Issue 6 will explore the feet and ankles in gymnastics. This chapter does not give foot positions, ankle-loading rules, tendon exercises or injury advice.

Producing Force

EVIDENCE STATUS **GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE** **PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION**



CHELSEA AT TAKE-OFF

At take-off, Chelsea's whole body contributes as she pushes against the surface and changes her motion. This is one illustrated moment, not an ideal technique.

To leave a surface, the gymnast must change the body's motion by producing force against that surface. The floor or apparatus pushes back. How the movement unfolds depends on the task: starting from stillness is different from arriving with speed, and a one-foot take-off is different from a two-foot take-off.

At the lower limb, knee extension and ankle plantarflexion may contribute. The quadriceps and calf complex are therefore part of the story—but not the whole story. The hips, trunk and arms also contribute, as do the child's timing, position and preparation.

Research in gymnastics often studies controlled tasks such as drop jumps or landings because researchers need repeatable conditions^[5,8]. Those tasks can reveal how force and movement change across groups or situations. They do not recreate every approach, surface, apparatus or decision that appears in a class.

For families, the useful principle is shared work. A higher jump cannot be credited to one muscle by observation alone. Nor does a lower jump prove that one part is weak. Children are learning to coordinate a changing body in changing tasks; one attempt can reflect timing, confidence, instruction, fatigue, attention, surface or familiarity as well as physical capacity.

MOVEMENT LENS — TAKE-OFF

The leg joints do not fire like separate switches. They contribute within one timed movement.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Power comes from one strong muscle.”

Muscle strength can matter, but a jump also depends on how the whole body organises force for the task. Observation alone cannot separate those ingredients.

Managing Force

EVIDENCE STATUS

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION



CHELSEA ON RETURN

On return, Chelsea's whole body manages another rapid change in motion. This is one illustrated moment, not an ideal angle or a coaching instruction.

Landing is a rapid change in motion. When the gymnast meets a surface, motion does not simply disappear. It is managed across time by the surface and by coordinated changes throughout the body.

The hips, knees and ankles may bend as the child returns. Muscles can produce force while that movement continues: the quadriceps may help control knee bending; the hamstrings may contribute around hip and knee; the calf complex may contribute as the ankle changes. The trunk and arms remain part of the action. Research with young gymnasts confirms that landing patterns can change with task height, training background and the way the landing is studied^[5,6].

This makes “absorb the shock with the knees” an incomplete explanation. The knees matter, but no single joint or muscle group independently receives and removes a landing. A surface also deforms, and what the gymnast was doing before contact affects what happens after it.

Sound can be a useful observation, but it is not a safety test. A quieter contact may accompany a different movement strategy, yet the ear cannot reveal joint motion, muscle force, surface force or internal loading. Loud does not automatically mean dangerous, and quiet does not automatically mean safe.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“A quiet landing is automatically a safe landing.”

Professional interpretation: Sound is one clue within a much larger event. It cannot diagnose safety, technique, injury risk or the condition of one muscle.

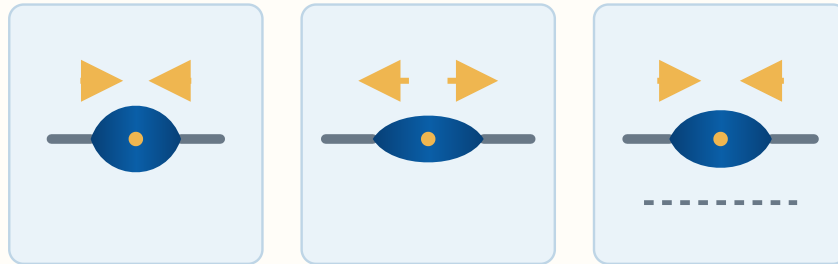
MOVEMENT LENS — LANDING

A landing is a change in motion, not a photograph. What happened before contact—and what the gymnast must do next—matters too.

“A landing is shared work—not a verdict delivered by one angle or one sound.”

Shorten, Control, Hold

EVIDENCE STATUS **ESTABLISHED ANATOMY**



SHORTEN, CONTROL, HOLD

Muscle force may accompany shortening, active lengthening or very little visible change in muscle length.

“A muscle contracts” does not always mean “a muscle gets shorter”. In physiology, contraction means that the muscle is producing force. Its visible length may shorten, lengthen or change very little while it does so^[4].

That gives us three useful family-facing words:

SHORTEN

A muscle can produce force as it becomes shorter. During part of a take-off, for example, a muscle group may contribute while a joint moves in the direction associated with that group.

Technical term: *concentric action.*

CONTROL

A muscle can produce force while becoming longer. This can help regulate a change in motion. During a landing, the knee may continue bending while the quadriceps produce force; the joint movement and the muscle’s contribution do not have to point in the same simple direction.

Technical term: *eccentric action.*

HOLD

A muscle can produce force while its overall length changes very little. This may help maintain a position against another force, although a real gymnastics hold still involves small adjustments across the body.

Technical term: *isometric action.*

These categories describe relationships between force and muscle length. They are not three training prescriptions, and a whole movement cannot usually be placed in only one box. Different muscles may be doing different things at the same time; a muscle may also change from one type of action to another within a fraction of a second.

LANGUAGE CHECK

- **Not:** “The muscle relaxed because the joint bent.”
- **Better:** “The muscle may still have been producing force while lengthening.”
- **Not:** “Holding means nothing is happening.”
- **Better:** “The visible position may be steady while muscles continue producing force.”

“Contracting describes force production—not one visible direction of movement.”

The Task Changes the Pattern

EVIDENCE STATUS

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE

The word *jump* covers many tasks. So does *landing*. Change the approach, support, surface or intended next movement, and the body has a different problem to solve.

CHANGE THE TASK, CHANGE THE PATTERN

TWO-FOOT TAKE-OFF

Both feet share contact, but that does not mean every joint or side contributes identically. Starting from stillness and taking off after an approach are different situations.

ONE-FOOT TAKE-OFF

Support begins through one foot, with momentum and body direction shaping the demand. It should not be judged against a two-foot task as though one pattern were the template for both.

REBOUND

The gymnast returns to a surface and prepares to leave it again. Managing contact and producing the next take-off are closely linked.

CONTROLLED LANDING

The intended outcome is to finish rather than rebound immediately. Holding the end position creates a different demand from continuing into the next skill.

The surface is part of every task. In a small laboratory study, young female gymnasts and children without gymnastics experience completed standardised drop landings across five surface conditions. The measured lower-limb responses changed with mat properties and participant background^[9]. That does not establish a “safest mat” for every child. It shows why a landing cannot be separated from the surface on which it occurs.

Across the gymnastics literature, researchers have also used different drop heights, instructions, age groups, training levels and measurements^[5,6,8,9]. Variation is not a flaw to hide; it is a reason to report context.

RESEARCH BOUNDARY

Gymnastics landing studies use different ages, training levels, drop heights, surfaces and measurements. Their findings help explain possibilities; they do not establish one universal landing for every child and skill.

What Families Can Notice—Without Diagnosing

EVIDENCE STATUS

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

Families often see patterns that matter: a child may look confident in one task and hesitant in another; a landing may change on a different surface; a new skill may look less settled before practice and coaching make it familiar. These are useful observations to share—not diagnoses to make.

NOTICE CONTEXT

Ask what the child was doing. Was it a jump from stillness, a running take-off, a rebound or a landing intended to finish? Was the surface or apparatus unfamiliar? Was this the first attempt or one of many? The task gives the movement meaning.

NOTICE CHANGE

A sudden difference from the child's usual movement may be more useful to communicate than comparing that child with someone else. The child's own words matter: pain, fear, unusual difficulty or feeling unwell should be heard and passed to the coach.

NOTICE PATTERNS—CAUTIOUSLY

One sound, angle or attempt is a snapshot. Knees moving inward on one landing do not prove that one muscle is weak. A quiet contact does not certify safety. A stronger leg test does not guarantee a better landing or prevent injury. Movement reflects anatomy, timing, coordination, task, exposure, equipment, coaching and the individual child.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“If the knees move inward, one muscle must be weak.”

A visible feature can have several explanations. It is not a home screening test, and a photograph cannot identify the condition or contribution of one muscle^[7].

ANOTHER CLAIM TO REJECT

“Stronger legs guarantee better landings or prevent injury.”

Strength is one part of a wider system. The current gymnastics evidence does not combine strength, muscle activity and stabilisation measures into one universal answer^[5].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Notice patterns and listen to the child—but do not turn one sound, angle or landing into a diagnosis.

A USEFUL CONVERSATION

- **Child:** What did it feel like?
- **Family to coach:** We noticed a change; have you seen it too?
- **Coach:** What was the task, and is it appropriate to continue, adapt or stop?
- **Healthcare professional:** Is assessment needed when pain, injury or an unexplained change is present?

This is observation with humility: enough attention to communicate well, without pretending that a family view from the side of the gym can replace coaching or clinical assessment.

What the Research Can—and Cannot—Tell Us

EVIDENCE STATUS

PEER-REVIEWED BIOMECHANICS

GYMNASTICS-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE

TRANSFERRED EVIDENCE

FROM WHAT WE KNOW TO WHAT WE MUST NOT ASSUME

1

WHAT ANATOMY ESTABLISHES

The quadriceps, hamstrings and calf complex have identifiable structures and accepted joint relationships.

2

WHAT A SPECIFIC STUDY OBSERVED

Researchers measured particular participants completing a defined task with named methods.

3

WHAT KGM MAY REASONABLY EXPLAIN

Together, anatomy and research help explain why take-off and landing are shared, task-dependent actions.

4

WHAT THE EVIDENCE DOES NOT PERMIT

It cannot establish one perfect landing, diagnose a child from appearance or sound, or guarantee injury prevention.

Scientists can measure joint motion, forces under a surface and electrical activity associated with selected muscles. Each method answers a valuable question. None captures the whole child.

A 2025 scoping review found only eight eligible gymnastics landing studies, involving 212 participants aged 8–25. All included at least one group of competitive gymnasts, only one focused solely on children, and none involved recreational gymnasts. The tasks and methods varied, and no included study examined muscle strength, muscle activity and stabilisation measures together^[5].

Individual studies add useful examples. A small child study showed that prescribed drop height and training background were associated with different measured landing strategies^[6]. Another small study found different responses across mat conditions and participant backgrounds^[9]. A larger cross-sectional study found different drop-jump profiles across competitive contexts in young female gymnasts^[8]. Each tells us about its participants and task—not every child and every skill.

Transferred evidence can help with a mechanism when its boundary is visible. The elite team-sport athlete study on quadriceps and hamstring activity helps explain possible overlap, but it is not direct evidence about recreational primary-school gymnasts^[7].

Even sophisticated measures need interpretation. A specialised modelling study of gymnastics landings showed why lowering one external force measure cannot automatically be translated into lower internal loading or lower injury potential^[10]. One number is evidence, not a complete verdict.

HOW TO READ THE LABELS

- **Established anatomy:** structure and accepted joint action.
- **Peer-reviewed biomechanics:** measurements from defined participants and tasks.
- **Gymnastics-specific evidence:** research involving gymnasts, still limited by age, level and task.
- **Transferred evidence:** a bounded example from another population.
- **Professional interpretation:** KGM’s family-facing explanation, not a measured finding.
- **Health guidance:** current official advice, checked again before publication.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The evidence is useful because it replaces guesswork with measured questions. Its limits are equally useful: they stop a laboratory task from becoming a universal coaching rule.

Safety and Health Notices

EVIDENCE STATUS

HEALTH GUIDANCE

EDUCATIONAL BOUNDARY

This chapter is general education. It is not an assessment, diagnosis, treatment plan, rehabilitation programme or individual training plan.

STOP AND COMMUNICATE

A child should tell the coach if a movement causes pain, feels suddenly different or makes it difficult to continue normally. The coach can stop or adapt the activity and inform the parent or carer in line with the programme's procedures. Pain should not be treated as a technique challenge or a reason to try harder.

DO NOT DIAGNOSE FROM THIS CHAPTER

Do not use an illustration, photograph, sound, joint position or muscle description in these pages to diagnose a limp, swelling, weakness or injury. An unexplained limp should be checked rather than explained away at home^[11].

Current NHS child-specific guidance says to contact a GP if a child has an unexplained limp. It says to call 999 or go to A&E if a child has sudden pain in the hip, knee or thigh; cannot put weight on the leg; has a leg that has changed shape or points at an odd angle; feels generally unwell with a high temperature; has severe pain in the lower abdomen; or has symptoms that worsen^[11].

The separate NHS knee-pain page gives NHS 111 advice for urgent knee symptoms, including a knee that is very painful, cannot be moved or cannot take weight, is badly swollen or has changed shape, locks or gives way, or is hot and red alongside a high temperature^[12].

Use the current linked NHS page for the correct route. Online health guidance can change, and a short magazine summary cannot cover every circumstance.

RETURN BELONGS TO THE INDIVIDUAL

After pain or injury, return to gymnastics should follow advice from the appropriate healthcare professional and communication among the child, family and coach. A magazine cannot set a return timetable.

TRAINING NOTICE

Gymnastics skills should be taught and supervised by appropriately qualified coaches in a suitable environment, using appropriate equipment and progressions matched to the child's age, experience and readiness. This chapter explains anatomy; it does not teach jumping, landing or rebound skills and does not prescribe exercises.

FOR FAMILIES

- Listen when a child reports pain or a sudden change.
- Share the observation with the coach.
- Follow current NHS guidance when health advice is needed.
- Do not use one landing to test, compare or label a child.

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Established anatomy, peer-reviewed biomechanics and current official health guidance.

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Foundations

Food, Growth & Gymnastics

Vitamins: Small Nutrients, Big Effects

What vitamins do for growing children—and when UK guidance adds something to the food-first story.



A

B

C

D

E

K

CHELSEA EXPLAINS

A vitamin has a job inside my body. That does not mean an extra scoop or gummy makes my next jump higher.

A child leaves a London school in September, eats something familiar on the way to gymnastics and reaches the class as the afternoon light fades. At home, a parent sees an advert for a bright bottle of “energy” or “immune” vitamins. Would it make the child healthier—or more ready to learn a skill?

It is a reasonable question. Vitamins are essential, but the promises around them can be much bigger than the evidence. The body needs vitamins in small amounts for different everyday jobs. Most people get what they need from varied, balanced food, although official guidance does recommend particular supplements in particular circumstances^[1].

This chapter begins where Issue 4 left off. Dietary fat helps the body absorb some vitamins. Now we will ask what those vitamins actually do, why other vitamins behave differently, and why “more” is not a sensible gymnastics target. We will also explain the important UK exception: vitamin D guidance during autumn and winter, with different advice for younger children.

For a growing gymnast, the starting point remains the same as it has throughout this series: enough food, variety over time and room to enjoy both school and movement. Growth comes before performance. A vitamin cannot replace a missed meal, a night's sleep or the patient practice through which children learn gymnastics.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What Vitamins Do

Food supplies the energy a child uses across the day. Vitamins are different: they are needed in small amounts to help normal processes work. They do not provide that energy themselves. This is why a vitamin pill is not a substitute for breakfast, lunch or a workable meal pattern^[1].

The word *vitamins* can sound as though it describes one single substance. It does not. Vitamin A has roles that include vision in dim light and healthy skin. Some B vitamins help the body release energy **from food**. Vitamin C helps maintain healthy tissues. Vitamin D helps regulate nutrients needed for bones, teeth and muscles^[3,6–8]. These are normal functions, not promises of a quicker handstand or a stronger vault.

A varied diet gives families more than a checklist of letters. Fruit and vegetables, grain foods, beans, dairy or suitable alternatives, eggs, fish and other foods can contribute different nutrients across the week. The UK Eatwell Guide describes a balance across the overall pattern, not a requirement that every child's plate looks identical at every meal^[2].

A JOB, NOT A SUPERPOWER

“Supports normal function” means the body needs a nutrient. It does not mean that taking extra will improve a child who already has enough.

Two Families of Vitamins

Two Ways the Body Handles Vitamins

Fat-soluble

A · D · E · K

absorbed with dietary fat; can be stored.

Water-soluble

B group · C

dissolve in water; individual vitamins still have different roles.

The categories describe handling, not sporting value. Neither means that extra supplements are automatically useful.

Issue 4 introduced the fat-soluble vitamins. Here is the complete map: A, D, E and K are fat-soluble; the B vitamins and vitamin C are water-soluble. These labels describe how vitamins are handled in the body, not which group is “better”. The fat-soluble group is absorbed with dietary fat, and members of that group can be stored. Water-soluble vitamins dissolve in water, but different B vitamins do not all behave in precisely the same way^[3–8].

Neither category is an invitation to take a high-dose supplement. Too much of some fat-soluble vitamins can be harmful, and “water-soluble” does not mean “unlimited and safe”: the NHS warns about high doses of some B vitamins and vitamin C too^[3,6–8].

For a family, the useful conclusion is simpler than the chemistry. Keep ordinary, varied food at the centre. Follow age-appropriate official advice where it applies. If a supplement is needed, the appropriate dose matters; a bottle labelled “natural” or “for active kids” does not change that.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Vitamins A, E, K and B

The body can also turn beta-carotene from foods such as carrots, sweet potatoes and leafy vegetables into vitamin A^[3].

Vitamins in Familiar Foods

VITAMIN	ONE NORMAL ROLE	FAMILIAR EXAMPLES	WHAT IT DOES NOT PROMISE
A	Dim-light vision, skin and normal immune function ^[3]	Eggs; dairy; oily fish; carrots, sweet potatoes and leafy vegetables as beta-carotene sources	Perfect eyesight or fewer missed classes
E	Healthy skin and eyes; normal immune function ^[4]	Plant oils; nuts; seeds	Faster recovery after a difficult session
K	Blood clotting and wound healing ^[5]	Leafy vegetables; vegetable oils; grains	Protection from gymnastics injuries

Food examples are options, not a required shopping list. A child's overall pattern matters more than one meal.

The fat-soluble label also gives a reason to be careful with products that overlap. A child might be offered a multivitamin, vitamin drops and a fish-liver-oil product by different adults, each with the best intentions. More than one can contain vitamin A or D. Check the label, and ask a pharmacist if you are unsure before combining them^[3,9].

B Vitamins: Helping the Body Use Food

There is no single “vitamin B”. The B group includes several vitamins with different roles. Thiamin (B1) helps the body break down and release energy from food. B6 helps the body use energy from protein and carbohydrate and helps form haemoglobin. B12 is involved in red blood cells and a healthy nervous system. Folate also matters for red blood cells^[6].

That wording is important. A B-vitamin supplement does not *contain* the energy a child missed by not eating lunch. A child who reaches the gym hungry needs a workable food routine, not an “energy vitamin”.

The food sources are ordinary and varied: wholegrain bread, peas, eggs, milk or yoghurt, fish, meat, leafy vegetables, beans and some fortified cereals can contribute different B vitamins^[6]. Not every family eats all of these foods, nor should they need to. The useful question is whether the child's overall diet offers reliable sources of the nutrients they need.

WHEN A DIET NEEDS A CLOSER LOOK

Vitamin B12 occurs naturally mainly in animal foods. If a child eats a vegan diet, a reliable source from B12-fortified foods and/or a suitable supplement needs deliberate planning. A varied vegan diet can be healthy, but “plant-based” on a packet does not tell you whether B12 is present; check the label and seek individual advice when needed^[6,10].

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Vitamin C and a British Winter

Vitamin C helps maintain healthy skin, blood vessels, bones and cartilage, and it plays a part in wound healing^[7]. The NHS also explains that vitamin C in a meal can help the body absorb iron from plant foods^[9,10]. We will look at iron more fully in the next issue, when this series turns to minerals.

Fruit and vegetables offer many possible sources: citrus fruit, strawberries, peppers, broccoli and even potatoes are examples^[7]. A family does not need a particular fruit imported from far away to “do vitamins properly”. Fresh, frozen and cooked foods can all be part of a varied pattern^[2]. The aim is variety over time, not a daily vitamin score.

The phrase “immune vitamin” can mislead. Vitamin C is needed for normal health; that does not mean a high-dose product can promise that a gymnast will not catch a cold or miss school. The NHS says people should generally be able to get the vitamin C they need from a varied, balanced diet and warns that excessive supplement doses can cause harm^[7].

Vitamin D and a British Winter

The UK Vitamin D Year

Spring / summer

Late March/early April–September: many people can make vitamin D from sunlight on their skin when outdoors.

Autumn / winter

October–early March: UK sunlight is not sufficient for that production.

Supplement advice depends on age and circumstances; see the facing guidance.

This is national UK guidance, not a special requirement created by London or gymnastics^[8].

Winter Sunlight Is Not a Reliable Vitamin D Source

Between October and early March, UK sunlight does not enable the body to make enough vitamin D. Only a small number of foods contain it naturally. A bright winter walk still matters for many reasons—but it cannot be counted on as a vitamin D source^[8,14].

The skin makes vitamin D in response to UVB light; the body can still absorb vitamin D from food or a suitable supplement.

Vitamin D helps the body regulate calcium and phosphate, which are needed for healthy bones, teeth and muscles^[8]. This matters to a growing child, but it is not a claim that a tablet improves a landing or prevents an injury.

Oily fish and egg yolks are among the few food sources; some spreads and breakfast cereals have vitamin D added. Ordinary UK cows' milk is generally not fortified^[8]. Sun safety still matters in brighter months: the answer is never to keep a child outside until their skin reddens^[9].

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What the NHS Actually Advises

NHS Vitamin D Advice at a Glance	
Over four · autumn and winter Consider 10 micrograms (400 international units, or IU) of vitamin D daily ^[8] .	Ages one to four · all year Should be given 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D daily ^[8,9] .
Over four · limited outdoor exposure The NHS recommends 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D daily throughout the year if a child is not often outdoors or usually covers most of their skin outdoors ^[8] .	Darker skin · all year Consider 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D daily throughout the year ^[8] .
<i>The separate NHS young-child page also advises daily vitamins A, C and D for ages six months to five years^[9]. Check overlapping products before giving more than one.</i>	

The key distinction is ‘consider’ for those over four in autumn/winter, versus year-round ‘should be given’ advice for ages one to four^[8,9].

Advice changes with age. For **children over four**, the NHS says everyone should **consider a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D during autumn and winter**. For those over four who are not often outdoors or usually cover most of their skin outdoors, it recommends taking this amount throughout the year. People with darker skin should also consider it all year^[8]. This is public-health advice, not a performance supplement for gymnasts.

For **children aged one to four**, NHS advice is different: they **should be given a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D throughout the year^[8,9]**. The NHS's separate young-child page also advises that children **aged six months to five years** are given daily supplements containing **vitamins A, C and D**. That page includes an infant-formula exception for babies, not a reason to change advice for a primary-school gymnast^[9].

The two NHS pages use overlapping age language around the fifth birthday. A family whose child is near that boundary—or already uses drops, a multivitamin or fish-liver oil—should use the current NHS pages and ask a pharmacist or health visitor which *single suitable product* meets the advice. The NHS warns against giving two overlapping supplements at the same time and against exceeding the stated dose^[9].

READ THE ADVICE, NOT THE ADVERTISING

Check the child's age, the label's vitamin D amount, whether vitamins A or D are duplicated in another product, and whether a health professional has given different individual advice. Do not choose a higher dose because a child trains more often.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Vitamin D: Why the Numbers Differ

Is the UK recommendation too low? That is a fair question. These figures concern *total daily intake*, not a child's supplement dose. Their difference depends on the blood-level target chosen—and on whether guidance reaches families.

UK · REFERENCE INTAKE, AGES 4+

10 µg (400 IU)

SACN aimed to keep almost everyone at or above **25 nmol/L** through winter, a minimum protective level for musculoskeletal health^[13,14].

US · DIETARY ALLOWANCE, AGES 1–18

15 µg (600 IU)

The US reference is tied to about **50 nmol/L** for nearly all—an importantly different target^[15].

A Serious Statistical Challenge

In 2014, Veugelers and Ekwaru argued that the US calculation used averages from study groups in a way that understated variation between people^[16]. The criticism deserves attention: a population recommendation should not describe only the average participant. But the paper was a methodological letter, not a trial finding a safe or necessary dose for children. It did not establish that the later UK calculation was copied from the US one.

A 2017 analysis using **individual data from 882 participants aged 4–90** across seven winter trials adds important perspective. It estimated about **10 µg/day (400 IU/day) of total intake** to keep nearly all above 25 nmol/L, but about **26 µg/day (1,040 IU/day)** for a 50 nmol/L target. Both figures are modelled estimates for the studied populations—not an instruction to give a child 26 µg (1,040 IU)^[17].

What Children's Research Adds

One winter trial in 119 white Danish children aged 4–8 estimated different **total intakes** depending on the blood threshold chosen: about 8 µg/day (320 IU/day) to keep nearly all above 30 nmol/L, and about 20 µg/day (800 IU/day) for 50 nmol/L^[18]. These are findings from a particular study, not a universal prescription for London children.

The problem is not only theoretical. UK survey data from 2016–19 found that **19% of children aged 4–10** and **37% of those aged 11–18** were below even the UK's 25 nmol/L threshold in January–March^[14]. These are national, historical survey figures—not a current estimate for London or for gymnasts.

Why Has Guidance Not Changed?

In June 2026, the Department of Health and Social Care said there were **no plans to reassess** population recommendations; it pointed to SACN's 2016 review and its 25 nmol/L protective threshold^[19]. SACN's 2024 review acknowledged that existing advice has had limited impact and explored food fortification as another route^[14]. The published record supports debate about the chosen threshold and the reach of the policy. It does not show that officials retained an error because they were reluctant to admit one.

FROM THE EDITOR · KGM EDITORIAL POSITION

Vitamin D supplements belong in child-health advice, especially in winter. **400 IU is a population reference, not every child's ideal intake**. Participant-level and child studies warrant testing higher total intakes^[17,18]. The UK's decision not to reassess its 25 nmol/L floor despite winter shortfalls is unsatisfactory^[14,19]. KGM calls for a transparent, child-focused review. Meanwhile, follow age-specific advice; discuss any higher individual dose with a qualified clinician.

Evidence status: official guidance and national survey [13–15,19]; peer-reviewed methodological critique and participant-level analysis [16–17]; a child-specific randomized trial [18]; clearly labelled KGM editorial position.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Gymnastics and the London Week

Gymnastics gives a child chances to practise, move, listen, try again and enjoy what the body can learn. It does not create a separate, universal vitamin prescription. The needs of a growing child still come first. Reviews of broader athlete research do not support supplements as a routine performance strategy for well-nourished athletes^[11,12]. Those reviews did not directly test skill learning in recreational primary-school gymnasts, so the responsible conclusion is modest: do not sell vitamin products as a shortcut.

It is also possible for a supplement to be appropriate without being a “sports supplement”. The NHS autumn/winter vitamin D advice is a population-health recommendation. A child with a medically assessed deficiency or a restricted diet may need individual care. These are different reasons, and they should not be blurred with product marketing.

If a parent asks, “Would vitamins help my child concentrate at class?”, a useful first response is not a packet recommendation. Consider the full day: food since school lunch, sleep, illness, stress and how the child feels. Vitamins have normal roles over time; one class does not reveal a deficiency.

EVIDENCE STATUS

The vitamin-role statements in this chapter are established physiology described by NHS guidance. The supplement-performance caution comes from peer-reviewed reviews in broader athlete populations; the school-to-gymnastics examples are KGM professional interpretation, not original research findings.

London Reality: The Ordinary Week Still Counts

1

SCHOOL LUNCH
an ordinary start

2

BUS OR TUBE
across the city

3

GYMNASTICS
before the family meal

LONDON REALITY

A September afternoon can become an October evening surprisingly quickly. A child may have eaten a school lunch, travelled by bus or Tube, and arrived at gymnastics before the family meal. The practical question is not whether the child has taken an “active-kids” vitamin; it is whether the family has a steady enough food routine, and whether the NHS seasonal vitamin D advice applies to that child's age^[2,8].

Families build those routines in many ways. A packed snack, a school dinner, a family dish prepared earlier, a café stop or a later evening meal can all fit real life. Cultural variety is an advantage here, not a problem to be solved: different cuisines offer different combinations of vegetables, grains, pulses, eggs, fish, dairy or suitable alternatives. Nobody needs to copy a magazine menu for their child to be well cared for.

What does require specific attention is a genuine dietary restriction. If a child avoids a broad group of foods because of allergy, sensory difficulty, ethics or another reason, a parent can ask a qualified professional how to keep the overall pattern adequate. That is a question about the child's whole diet and growth—not permission for a coach to diagnose a missing vitamin.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Notice Patterns, Not “Vitamin Symptoms”

Families often notice that a child is tired, distracted, off their food or less enthusiastic about gymnastics. Those observations matter. They are not, by themselves, a vitamin test. A difficult week can involve illness, sleep, school demands, travel, mood, growth, training load or many other factors. A list in a magazine cannot identify the cause.

Start with calm questions: “How has your day been?” “Have you eaten since lunch?” “Is anything making food difficult at the moment?” Look for patterns across days, not a verdict on one class. If symptoms persist, a child’s growth is concerning, eating has become restricted, or a family suspects a deficiency, speak with a GP or an appropriately qualified paediatric dietitian. A coach can share observations, but should not prescribe supplements, testing or treatment.

What Families Often Misunderstand

“Vitamins give energy.” Vitamins provide no calories. Some help the body release energy from food; correcting a deficiency may ease tiredness, but extra vitamins are not instant fuel^[1,6].

- **“Water-soluble means any dose is safe.”** The category is not a safety guarantee^[6,7].
- **“Food first means never supplement.”** NHS guidance includes real age-specific exceptions, particularly vitamin D^[8,9].
- **“A supplement will improve gymnastics.”** Broader athlete evidence does not support routine supplementation as a performance shortcut for the well-nourished^[11,12].

KEY TAKEAWAY

Vitamins support different normal jobs in a growing body, but more is not automatically better. Build a varied, adequate food pattern; follow current NHS vitamin D and young-child advice for the child’s age; and seek individual help when a real concern persists. Growth comes before performance.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next time, we will meet another set of small but essential nutrients: minerals. We will look at how foods, growth and normal body functions connect—without treating a child’s tiredness or sporting progress as a diagnosis.

HEALTH NOTICE

This chapter offers general education, not individual diagnosis or treatment. Supplements can overlap and some excessive doses can harm. For a child’s specific health condition, dietary restriction, symptoms or supplement plan, use current NHS guidance and speak with a GP, pharmacist or appropriately qualified paediatric dietitian as appropriate.

If the Debate Leaves You Wondering What to Do

START WITH THE CHILD’S AGE

Read the current NHS guidance for that age and season. The advice is different for children aged one to four and those over four^[8,9].

CHECK WHAT IS ALREADY GIVEN

Look at drops, multivitamins and fish-liver oil together. More than one product can duplicate vitamin A or D^[8,9].

DO NOT TURN A STUDY INTO A DOSE

A blood-level target or population estimate does not tell you what one child should take. Do not raise the dose because of a headline or gymnastics training^[16–18].

ASK ABOUT A REAL CONCERN

If a child has persistent symptoms, a restricted diet or a medical condition, talk with a GP, pharmacist or appropriately qualified paediatric dietitian about individual advice.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Sources and Evidence Notes

The guidance that families should act on is the current NHS advice. The newer research below explains the scientific question; it is not an alternative dose chart for children.

Official guidance and policy: UK NHS and government [1–10,13–14], US NIH [15], UK Parliament [19].

Peer-reviewed evidence: athlete reviews [11–12], methodological critique [16], pooled participant-level analysis [17], child winter trial [18].

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19. Department of Health and Social Care. (2026, 23 June). *Vitamin D: Written question 9754* [Parliamentary answer]. [Official UK Parliament record](#).

Reading note: UK and US amounts refer to different policy targets. The blood-level estimates in [17–18] are study results, not KGM supplement recommendations. The editor's policy question on page 53 is an editorial position.

Foundations

Recovery in Gymnastics

Growing Bodies, Changing Recovery

When the child changes, the familiar lesson can feel different

A child steps onto the low beam. Last term, this balance felt ordinary. Today, she pauses and says, “It feels different.” Her parent has noticed that her shoes and leotard have needed replacing, but neither the parent nor the coach can tell from that moment alone why the balance feels unfamiliar.

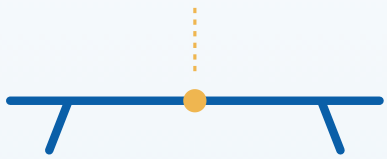
Perhaps she is tired. Perhaps the skill needs more practice. Perhaps her body is changing, or something else is on her mind. The most useful first response is not to name a “growth spurt” from the side of the gym. It is to listen to what the child means by *different*.

In this series, we have looked at recovery after a lesson, the place of sleep, and the wider week a child brings into the gym. This time, the timescale is longer: the child is growing. That can change how movement is experienced, but it does not provide an instant explanation for every difficult session.

THE STORY SO FAR

Issue 1	Recovery belongs within training.
Issue 2	Learning and adaptation continue after practice.
Issue 3	Sleep matters across ordinary nights.
Issue 4	The whole week gives a lesson its context.
Issue 5	A developing child may meet the same skill with a changing body and changing needs.

SAME APPARATUS · CHANGING CHILD



“It feels different.”

One observation can begin a conversation. It cannot name a cause.

LISTEN FIRST → UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCE

Growth Is Not One Event

Children grow through childhood; puberty brings further physical changes, and its timing varies. The NHS notes a broad range of normal timing for the start of puberty and advises families to speak to a GP if they are concerned that it is unusually early or late^[1]. A seven-year-old who needs longer trousers and a teenager growing rapidly are not in the same developmental situation. We should not call every visible change in a young gymnast a pubertal growth spurt.

Nor does a birthday tell us exactly how a child is developing. British Gymnastics’ good-practice guidance asks those planning training to consider each gymnast’s growth, maturation and development,

including physical qualities, movement skills, timing awareness, confidence and other aspects of development^[2]. That is a prompt to see the whole child, not an invitation for families to estimate biological maturity from appearance.

In gymnastics, a movement is learned with the body a child has *at that time*. As proportions, strength, mobility and experience change, a familiar task may be felt or organised differently. That is a reasonable way to think about development, not a way to diagnose the cause of one wobble. Some children will hardly notice a particular change; others may want more time, a different explanation or reassurance before a skill feels familiar again.

A GROWTH QUESTION

A Changed Skill Is Not a Diagnosis

Does Growing Make Children Clumsy?

“She has grown, so she is bound to be clumsy for a while” sounds reassuring, but it claims more than the research can support. A systematic review of adolescent sensorimotor development found inconsistent results on motor regression. Some children may experience delays or regressions in particular mechanisms, while important knowledge gaps remain^[3]. The review was about adolescence, not a prediction for every primary-school gymnast.

The better question is more specific: **What does this child notice, and is the change happening repeatedly?** A child might say that a balance feels less steady, that a landing is surprising, or that a once-comfortable shape now feels awkward. These descriptions are useful because they help a coach understand the task and the child's experience. They do not prove that growth caused the change.

Equally, growth is not a judgement on ability. A developing gymnast is not “behind” because a skill takes a little longer to settle. Children do not owe adults a smooth, uninterrupted line of progress.

What the Evidence Can—and Cannot—Tell Us

A 2026 systematic review examined factors affecting performance health during growth and maturation in adolescent competitive aesthetic and acrobatic athletes. Its 65 included studies drew on mixed sports and measures, with sub-elite or elite athletes aged 18 or younger^[4]. A separate review examined associations between growth, maturation and injury in elite youth pathways^[5].

These studies matter, especially for people planning more demanding sport. But they cannot tell a London family that a change in one recreational lesson is caused by maturation, that their child has a particular injury risk, or that a particular number of training hours is right. The most directly useful lesson for this chapter is modest: development deserves individual attention, and uncertainty should be stated honestly.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Research involving competitive adolescents is not a growth or recovery calculator for a younger recreational gymnast. The practical suggestions here are child-centred ways to communicate and respond, not a validated home test.

So Does Recovery Need to Change?

Sometimes the sensible plan will change, because the child's experience and needs have changed. That does not mean every growing child needs a prescribed extra day off, more stretching or more practice. The evidence used in this chapter does not establish one “growth-spurt recovery plan” for recreational primary-school gymnasts. British Gymnastics instead asks for training and recovery to be planned around the individual, and for plans to remain adaptable^[6].

For a family, that distinction matters. A newly uncertain skill should not automatically become a reason to add repetitions until the child “gets it back.” Nor should a child be withdrawn from enjoyable movement simply because an adult thinks they look taller. The useful response is to understand what has changed, ask how the child feels, and let the coach decide whether the session should be adjusted. If the concern is medical, it needs a health professional rather than a home recovery formula.

SAFETY NOTICE

Gymnastics skills should not be practised unsupervised. Many skills require qualified coaching, appropriate equipment, and a safe training environment. If you are unsure, focus on fundamentals and seek guidance from a qualified coach.

A CALMER CONVERSATION

Begin With the Child's Words

Ask About the Experience, Not the Body

After class, a parent might ask, “Which part felt different?” or “Was there a moment you wanted more time with?” That gives the child room to talk about movement, comfort and confidence without turning their body into a subject for public inspection. A child may answer immediately, later on the way home, or not at all. The conversation should remain an invitation, not an interview.

If a pattern becomes noticeable, the parent can pass on one short observation: “She has said the balance feels different over the past few lessons. What have you noticed?” A coach can then compare that with what they see in practice and consider whether the task, explanation, pace or session plan needs adapting. British Gymnastics’ policy expects individual, flexible planning and collaboration with gymnasts and parents or carers; it specifically names periods of rapid growth as times for extra consideration and possible training modification^[6].

The aim is not to decide whose explanation is correct. It is to give the child a better-supported route through the lesson. Sometimes that may mean practising an earlier version of a skill, allowing more time to feel secure, or adjusting what is asked that day. Those are examples of a coach’s professional judgement, not fixed “growth-spurt rules” for every gymnast.

A USEFUL EXCHANGE

Child

“The beam feels different when I turn.”

Parent or carer

“Thank you for telling me. What part felt different?”

Coach

“Let’s look at that part together and choose a manageable way to practise it.”

LONDON REALITY

The handover may be no longer than a sentence at a busy after-school class. That is enough to start. It need not become a chart of height, weight, scores or comparisons with another child. A health professional may make private measurements when clinically appropriate; that is different from adults measuring or ranking children for a gymnastics conversation. NHS guidance on children’s growth and weight emphasises supportive, non-shaming talk and advises families to seek advice if worried^[7].

Competitive Lens: If Gymnastics Is More Demanding

The picture changes when a gymnast is training and competing more intensively, especially through adolescence. The sport-specific research above and British Gymnastics’ policy give coaches a reason to plan with the individual gymnast in mind, rather than treating age or weekly hours as a complete description of what they need^[4,5,6]. The gymnast’s own account, their goals inside and outside gymnastics, and qualified support become especially important.

That does **not** mean a parent should calculate a child’s maturity, track body changes for selection, or decide on a new training limit alone. Formal monitoring, if it is appropriate in a competitive programme, belongs with suitably qualified people and should be handled respectfully and privately. A child should be able to say that something feels uncomfortable or that a plan is not working without fearing that they will be labelled uncommitted.

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

Growth Is Not a Verdict

When “Just Growing” Is Not Enough

The phrase *just growing* can close a conversation too early. If a child says something hurts, tell the coach; do not explain pain away as a growth phase. If a family is concerned about growth, puberty or a persistent change in health, a GP can assess the concern rather than a magazine—or a coach—guessing at the cause^[1,6,7]. Issue 6 of this series will look more closely at how children can report soreness and pain, and how adults can respond.

For now, the point is simpler. A child may grow into new strength, new skills and new confidence, but development is not a straight line. The same gym, apparatus and lesson can meet a changing person.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Listen first; make room for an individual response; seek qualified help when the concern is about health.

HEALTH NOTICE

This content is general information and not medical advice. For pain, injury, or health concerns, consult an appropriate healthcare professional.

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Gymnastics for Life

Masters & Lifelong Movement

ISSUE 5 · HISTORICAL FEATURE

Building a World Cup for a Lifetime

How Masters gymnasts are creating an international competition across generations

By Dr Stefan Kolimechkov

With Nate Sharpe

For many families, gymnastics is organised around childhood. A child trains after school; a parent arranges the journey, the kit and the timetable. Years later, that child may be old enough to coach or compete independently. What happens to the adult who still wants to learn, practise and perhaps compete?

Masters gymnastics offers one answer, though not the only one. The word *Masters* describes an adult competition pathway, not a requirement to have mastered every skill. Some participants have trained since childhood. Others started later, returned after a break, or changed which apparatus they use. Their routines can look very different. All still need a fair occasion to present what they can do now.



2026 Masters Gymnastics World Cup at the MIT in Cambridge, MA, USA.

A documented pathway for adults who still want to learn, practise and compete.

ORIGINS

From a bilateral meeting to an invitation

This chapter follows a particular answer that gymnasts and volunteers have been building together: an international Masters artistic gymnastics competition. It began as a meeting between Japan and Germany, widened into team events in Germany and the United States, and added a separate individual event in 2026. Its history matters because it shows that lifelong participation requires more than encouragement. Someone must make space in a calendar, assemble teams, write workable rules, judge routines, welcome newcomers and host the next meet.

Nate Sharpe has helped do that work. He helped form the US team, contributed to the Masters rules and illustrated the Masters Code. His account runs through this chapter alongside event notices, final results and the published Code. Where Nate recalls an intention or offers a view about the future, we identify it as his account^[2].

The precursor · 2022

On **18 September 2022**, a Japanese and a German men's Masters/senior team met at **Arena Tachikawa Tachihi, in the Tokyo area**. A contemporary report records a close bilateral contest embedded in a larger Japanese gymnastics event. It was an important beginning, but **it was not yet a numbered edition of the later international World Cup sequence**^[1].

Nate's recollection gives the practical background. Jens Krüger was a German gymnast living and working in Japan, familiar with the developed Masters competition scene in Germany. Friendships in Japan helped turn the idea of a Germany–Japan match into a real event. Nate is careful about a point we cannot recover from that recollection: he does not know whether Jens already envisaged a larger international series, or whether a friendly match was the immediate aim. What is documented is that the meeting happened; what followed was an invitation to widen the circle^[1,2].

The distinction is worth protecting. If we rename every precursor a “World Cup”, we make the story look more inevitable—and more centrally planned—than the records support. The stronger story is that people tested an idea, found companions, and built on it.

HISTORICAL PRECURSOR

18 September 2022

Arena Tachikawa Tachihi · Tokyo area

Precursor, not a numbered World Cup edition



Japan



Germany

WHY THE DISTINCTION MATTERS

The source establishes that the match happened. Nate's recollection explains relationships behind it, but does not establish Jens Krüger's original long-term intention^[1,2].

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL TEAM MEETING

Four countries in Einbeck

The next step came on **6 October 2023** in **Einbeck, Germany**. The event's documents do not all use the same title: the final result sheets say *Gymnastics Masters Team World Cup*, while contemporary reporting uses *International Seniors Gym Team Cup*. Both refer to the Einbeck international team meeting. The men's and women's final sheets each record teams from **Germany, Japan, the United States and Great Britain**^[3,4,5,6].

Nate was not recruited through a formal global circuit. He and his wife Julia trained with the MIT Gymnastics Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their teammate Bernd Schoner knew the German Masters scene and heard about the 2023

competition. According to Nate, Bernd asked whether they would help form a US team. Nate and Julia brought connections from their work with **United Club Gymnastics (UCG; previously known as NAIGC)** and experience organising gymnastics events. The chance to travel and to support gymnastics as a lifelong pursuit made the invitation attractive to them^[2].

That is how an international pathway can begin: through existing clubs and relationships, followed by the less glamorous work of assembling a team. The final results confirm that the US did compete in both disciplines; Nate's account explains how he became involved. Neither source should be made to do the other's job^[2,4,5].

"We love to travel, and the opportunity to combine that with gymnastics and to spread the love of gymnastics as a life-long pursuit was right up our alley."

Nate Sharpe · contributor testimony^[2]



Members of the US delegation in Einbeck, Germany, on 6 October 2023.

ARCHIVAL ANCHOR

The Masters World Cup Record

A documentary record of the formative international sequence · Research cut-off: 29 September 2026

2022 · THE PRECURSOR

 Japan–Germany men’s Masters / senior match · 18 September · Arena Tachikawa Tachihi, Tokyo area

Not a numbered edition of the later international sequence^[1]

YEAR / HOST	DOCUMENTED EVENT	FORMAT AND REPRESENTATION	GYMNAST EVIDENCE
2023  Germany Einbeck	6 October Sporthallen am Hubeweg Final sheets: Gymnastics Masters Team World Cup; reporting: International Seniors Gym Team Cup^[3–6]	Team meeting. Four MAG and four WAG teams from the same four countries: Germany, Japan, USA and Great Britain.	At least 69 distinct gymnasts with a positive score in final team sheets.
2024  United States Cambridge	2 June MIT DuPont Gymnasium Masters Gymnastics World Cup / II International Seniors Gym Team Cup^[7,8]	Team plus individual entries. Four MAG team countries; five WAG team countries. Brazil and Canada documented as individual-only. 10 represented countries^[2] .	134 gymnasts competed ^[2] .
2025  Germany Leipzig	1 June Sporthalle Brüderstraße International Masters Team Cup · within Deutsches Turnfest^[9–11]	Team event. Seven MAG and seven WAG teams; eight distinct countries across the disciplines.	At least 92 distinct positive-score gymnasts in final team sheets.
2026  United States Cambridge	3 May MIT DuPont Gymnasium Masters Gymnastics Individual World Cup^[14–16]	Individual all-around and apparatus awards. No team competition. 4 represented countries^[2] .	86 gymnasts competed ^[2] .

2027 · ANNOUNCED / FUTURE

 Japan Gymnastics Federation has announced 27 October at Arena Tachikawa Tachihi, Tokyo area. Team and individual all-around are planned; scoring rules remain in development. **No participation or result is yet established.**^[17,18]

HOW TO READ THE NUMBERS

The 2023 and 2025 figures are **KGM editorial minimums** derived from published final team sheets. The 2024 and 2026 totals are **completed-event figures** from contributor testimony^[2]. Because the source methods differ, the four rows do not form a like-for-like participation trend. Countries count distinct represented countries, never MAG and WAG sums.

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

Cambridge opens more ways in

In 2024 the competition crossed the Atlantic to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Nate and Julia were among those who helped host it, and the international teams were joined by gymnasts entering individually. The distinction is visible in the contemporary account: four men's national teams and five women's national teams competed, while gymnasts from Brazil and Canada also started as individuals. Counting only teams would erase those participants; adding the two team counts together would count several countries twice. The completed event brought together **134 gymnasts representing 10 countries**^[2,7,8].

For a gymnast who cannot join a national team, an individual route can matter. It can make the meeting

more open without pretending that every entry has the same role in team scoring. Nate says this addition was one of the most consequential changes between the original bilateral match and later events. His judgement is based on involvement in the series; the existence of the 2024 individual starters is independently documented^[2,7].

The atmosphere matters too, but should not be romanticised into evidence. Nate compares the events with US adult club gymnastics: friendly and serious at different levels, without the sense that a single standard of elite performance defines who belongs. That is his experience, not a measured comparison of every participant or organiser^[2].



Women's Team Medal Presentation at the 2024 Masters Gymnastics World Cup in Cambridge, USA.

Team membership and individual entry are not interchangeable records: Brazil and Canada are documented as individual participants, not as 2024 national teams^[7].

A WIDER MEETING

Leipzig inside a vast festival

The 2025 team competition took place in Leipzig during the International Deutsches Turnfest. Its final men's and women's sheets each show seven teams. Because the line-ups differ, they represent **eight distinct countries** overall—not fourteen. Brazil appears in the men's team result, Italy in the women's, and six countries appear in both^[9,10,11].

Turnfest itself was much larger than the Masters contest. The German Gymnastics Federation described about **80,000 participants at the wider festival**. This is context for the remarkable setting, **not** a Masters World Cup attendance figure. Nate remembers Leipzig as a notably different

experience from the smaller events: a Masters meet occurring amid an enormous programme of gymnastics and related activity. Both the large-festival setting and the more intimate competitions had their own value to him^[2,12].

This is the clearest documented expansion in the team-country record so far. It is not, by itself, proof that participation will keep growing, nor does it tell us how many adult gymnasts train in each country. The sheets describe who appeared in one competition. The people behind those entries are the real story: experienced gymnasts, later starters and returners sharing apparatus and a reason to prepare.



Opening procession of the International Masters Team Cup, Leipzig, 1 June 2025.

The wider Turnfest's approximate 80,000 participants must not be read as the Masters Cup's attendance^[12].

RULES MADE READABLE

What changes with age?

Families know the ordinary problem: a routine must be judged for what the gymnast performed and how well they performed it. Masters organisers face an added question. How can gymnasts from their 30s through their 70s and beyond take part in the same meaningful team and individual competition without treating age as either irrelevant or a guarantee of equal ability?

The published **2025–28 international Masters Code of Points** is one answer. It was developed with representatives from Germany, Japan, the United States and Great Britain, drawing on existing international gymnastics rules and experience from the 2023 and 2024 Masters team events. Nate is named on the US men's technical committee; he also reports producing illustrations for a Masters Code. The printed Code, not an interview summary, governs the exact technical description here^[2,13].

The Code calculates an age group from **competition year minus birth year**, then uses the decade group: AG 30, AG 40, AG 50, AG 60 or AG 70. Age is therefore handled by calendar-year group, not by calculating a fresh adjustment for every birthday or day of competition^[13].

Its most useful family-level distinction is between **difficulty** and **execution**. Difficulty concerns the content and recognised value of a routine. Execution concerns how it is performed. In the published Code, the value assigned to a recognised **FIG A element** rises across the age groups: **0.2** in AG 30, **0.3** in AG 40, **0.4** in AG 50, **0.5** in AG 60 and **0.6** in AG 70. This is a change to a classified element's *difficulty value* under that Code. It is **not** a blanket addition to every older gymnast's final score; it does not make a bent knee, an incomplete handstand or a fall disappear from execution judging^[13].

2025–28 INTERNATIONAL MASTERS CODE · ONE EXAMPLE, NOT A SCORE FORMULA

01

Age group

Competition year minus birth year; use the lower decade

→

02

Element difficulty

A recognised FIG A element has the value shown below

→

03

Execution

How the routine is performed remains judged

→

04

Apparatus rules

Event requirements and relevant provisions still apply

AG 30

0.2

AG 40

0.3

AG 50

0.4

AG 60

0.5

AG 70

0.6

Difficulty value of one recognised FIG A element under the international Code. These numbers are **not** a blanket bonus added to a gymnast's final score^[13].

BEYOND ONE NUMBER

A practical competition, not a perfect equaliser

Other parts of the Code also respond to age and apparatus. For example, the number of counting elements is lower from AG 60 in specified routines, and some requirements or permitted adaptations differ by apparatus. A vault cannot be explained as though it were a bar routine; men's and women's sections contain distinct provisions. A single “bonus points for being older” slogan would hide those important differences^[13].

Team scoring introduces another layer. The Code's appendix describes a model in which a team may include gymnasts from several decades, with up to five performing on an apparatus and the best three apparatus scores counting. It also says that the organiser's final event announcement can take precedence. That is a **specified team-event model**, not a universal rule for every Masters competition. Its purpose is to give age decades a place in one team, rather than placing neighbouring contests in the same building and calling them a shared event^[13].

Nate calls any handicap or age adjustment imperfect. Age is not the only influence on a routine: time to practise, experience, access to coaching, health and other circumstances matter too. He favours a system that works sufficiently well for a welcoming competition without becoming so fine-grained that judging is impractical. He reports that organisers have reviewed results for systematic age-group advantage and have not found a problem^[2].

“I think this makes the whole thing more fun, making it feel like everyone is part of the same thing instead of just happening to compete simultaneously but really only against people in your decade.”

Nate Sharpe · contributor testimony^[2]

WHAT THE CODE DOES—AND DOES NOT DO

It gives age decades a role in difficulty valuation and selected routine requirements. A routine still has to be performed and judged. The rules create a workable competition, not an exact mathematical equaliser of every person's training history, health or opportunity^[13].

“I think any attempt to institute an adjustment/handicap is always going to be imperfect”

Nate Sharpe · contributor testimony^[2]

DIFFERENT ROUTES

Team and individual are not the same event

TEAM PATHWAY

Across decades, together

AG 30 + AG 40 + AG 50 + ...

National teams may combine age decades. The international Code’s team appendix specifies an apparatus-score model, while the final event announcement can govern a particular meet^[13].

Up to five perform on an apparatus

→

Best three scores count for the team

2023 Einbeck · 2024 Cambridge · 2025 Leipzig

INDIVIDUAL PATHWAY

An entry in your own name

one gymnast → apparatus / all-around

The **2026 Cambridge Individual World Cup** awarded individual all-around and apparatus places. **There was no team competition.** Its published format points to the separate UCG Masters Rules Policy^[14–16].

Individual routines

→

All-around or apparatus awards

2026 Cambridge · separate event rules

The 2026 Cambridge meeting made a different route visible. Its published format explicitly states **there was no team competition**. Gymnasts could seek individual all-around or apparatus awards under the **UCG Masters Rules Policy** and that event's format. It would be misleading to explain a 2026 individual score by automatically applying the international team's 2025–28 appendix—or to portray the 2026 event as another national-team contest^[14,15,16].

This difference is an editorial strength, not a defect to smooth away. Team events ask whether a country can bring together gymnasts across decades, share routines and build a collective score. Individual events can give a person an entry point even when no team is available. Some gymnasts may value both. They are connected pathways, with different rules and different kinds of participation.

CONTRIBUTOR PROFILE

Nate Sharpe

Gymnast · US representative · Masters Code illustrator

An adult beginner who helped turn a friendly idea into a meeting across countries and decades.

STARTED AT 24

He took up gymnastics when his wife Julia wanted a training partner. He now competes on men’s and women’s apparatus.

ENGINEERING CAREER

After a career in mechanical engineering, he retired in 2023 and now prioritises family, volunteering and gymnastics.

ADULT GYMNASTICS

He helps organise adult and collegiate club gymnastics in the United States and serves as lead US representative for the Masters World Cup.

RULES COLLABORATOR

He worked extensively with Jens Krüger on the Masters rules and created illustrations for the Masters Code^[2,13].



Nate Sharpe at UCG Nationals, 10 April 2026.

Why his perspective matters

His biography helps explain why this is not simply a story of former elite athletes extending their careers. A later starter helped build an international opportunity in which former elite athletes, club gymnasts, returners and later starters can all take part. It does **not** prove that every adult has an equal route into the sport. Clubs, time, cost, coaching and accessible competitions still shape who can participate. Nate’s continuing work is part of that practical answer, not evidence that the problem has been solved.

Volunteers and institutions

The record does not support a simple story in which formal institutions are either absent or the sole owners of this initiative. A Lower Saxony gymnastics body issued the 2023 event invitation, the German Gymnastics Federation published the 2025 event and results, UCG published the Cambridge event information, and the Japan Gymnastics Federation has announced 2027. At the same time, Nate describes gymnasts, clubs and volunteers doing the connecting and organising that made the meetings possible^[2,3,8,9,10,11,14,17].

WITH NATE SHARPE

His recollections and assessments are attributed to him; official event notices, final sheets and the published Code establish the separate documentary record.

MASTERS LENS

From London to Cambridge

Dr Stefan Kolimechkov · editor and Masters gymnast

I travelled from London to compete in Cambridge in **2024**, and returned for the **2026 individual event**. That gives me a participant's view, but it also means I have a personal stake in the story. My experience should not stand in for a survey of the other gymnasts or for an organiser's official record.

The practical lesson for me is that an adult competition pathway must make room for real adult lives while still respecting the work of preparing a routine. Training, travel and recovery sit alongside work and family obligations. A route that exists only on paper is not enough; someone has to be able to get to the gym, practise safely and enter a meet. My participation is one example of what that pathway can make possible, not its centre.

Support without taking ownership

Nate is cautious about adding layers of federation administration. In his opinion, broader official attention could help people discover the event, but bureaucracy could also change what makes it welcoming. The useful question is practical: which forms of support would help more adults participate while preserving an event that volunteers can actually run?^[2]

Growth is not automatically success if the atmosphere and workload become unsustainable. Nate sees potential for many more countries, while recognising that a competition with hundreds or thousands of gymnasts could demand a different organisation. He hopes the team event's less frequent cycle may give organisers a break and make travel manageable. His idea of a new host country in **2029** is an aspiration, **not a confirmed event**. The 2027 Tokyo announcement is the documented next step; what follows remains open^[2,17,18].



Dr Stefan Kolimechkov warming up on rings the day before the 2024 Cambridge Masters competition.

AN ANNOUNCED NEXT STEP

Tokyo is a plan, not a result

27 OCTOBER 2027

Arena Tachikawa Tachihi · team and individual all-around planned



Tokyo area · Japan

ANNOUNCED / FUTURE

The Japan Gymnastics Federation has announced **27 October 2027** at Arena Tachikawa Tachihi for a Masters Gymnastics World Cup within Gymnastics Japan Open. The published outline plans both team and individual all-around competition, with rules to be agreed through international discussion. Those are meaningful commitments to prepare an event. They are **not** completed results or confirmed participation numbers. KGM should revisit the row after the competition and replace plans with verified outcomes^[17,18].

It will also be an opportunity to see whether the international structure can remain recognisable as it moves between hosts: adults from several countries and age decades preparing real gymnastics, meeting one another, and leaving a record the next generation can build on.

What this means for a family

A parent need not aim for an international team to be part of gymnastics for life. The more immediate question may be whether there is a suitable adult class, a coach who can adapt progressions, or a way to return after years away. In London, that decision has to fit around school collection, commuting, work hours, cost and the availability of training space. An international event does not remove those constraints. It does show why local adult opportunities are worth creating: they are the foundation from which wider participation can grow.

For a young gymnast, the lesson is equally important. Gymnastics does not have to be a brief childhood identity ending when school, work or family responsibilities change. Skills and ambitions can change; a person can continue to move, learn and belong. Competition is one possible expression of that continuity, not the price of admission.

“There are still so many countries that probably just have no idea that we exist!”

Nate Sharpe · contributor testimony^[2]

“I think success in ten years would be having more than twice as many countries involved, but while keeping the vibe and friendly/relaxed nature of the event.”

Nate Sharpe · contributor testimony^[2]

There can be another chapter of gymnastics after the one we first imagined.

METHOD AND EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

How this record was assembled

A historical table is only useful when the reader can see what each number proves. KGM used final team sheets where they exist, organiser notices for event format, contemporary reporting for context, and contributor testimony for personal involvement, judgements and the US-event totals. These are different kinds of evidence; none should silently stand in for another.

2023 · EINBECK

at least 69

34 MAG + 35 WAG distinct names with a positive apparatus score. One additional WAG zero-only line was not counted as a completed routine^[4,5].

2025 · LEIPZIG

at least 92

45 MAG + 48 WAG positive-score names, minus one gymnast recorded in both disciplines. One MAG zero-only line was excluded^[10,11].

These are editorial minimums, not official attendance totals. The two published team sheets do not necessarily capture every starter or individual side-event. They cannot support a year-on-year participation trend.

Which source answers which question?

Final sheets

Who has a recorded positive apparatus score; team-country representation.

Organiser documents

Dates, venue, event format and governing rules—not proof that every registrant started.

Contributor testimony

Personal involvement, recollections, professional judgement and completed-event totals for the two US competitions^[2].

Photographs

A documented scene, once identified; not a complete roster, age certificate or proof of a judged routine.

US EVENTS CONFIRMED

2024: 134 gymnasts from 10 countries^[2]. 2026: 86 gymnasts from 4 countries^[2].

STATUS MATTERS

The 2022 bilateral meeting is a precursor. The 2027 Japan event is announced and future, not a completed-result row. No edition number or confirmed 2029 event has been inferred.

The remaining source differences stay visible so that confirmed totals, editorial minimums and future-event plans are not mistaken for the same kind of evidence.

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Gymnastics for Life

The Kensington Gymnast

ISSUE 5 · INAUGURAL CHAPTER

Gymnastics for Life — Lived in Kensington

More than two decades after starting gymnastics at 15, Dr Stefan Kolimechkov is still training and competing. For the inaugural instalment of The Kensington Gymnast, he reflects on a journey that began with exclusion from school PE and grew into a lifelong relationship with movement — through gymnastics centres across London, Holland Park and Kensington Gardens.



September 2026 · Kensington Gardens — Kensington in one frame: the Round Pond and Kensington Palace, with the spire of St Mary Abbots rising on the skyline. This landscape has become part of the author's running, recovery and lifelong gymnastics practice. *Personal training archive: Stefan Kolimechkov.*

THE VIEW AFTER THE RUN

I had just finished another 5K run when I looked across Kensington Gardens.

The sun was setting behind the Round Pond and Kensington Palace. The water caught the last sunlight, the trees framed the view, and for a few moments the whole landscape seemed almost unreal.

I had been running as part of my aerobic physical preparation, but I stopped thinking about kilometres, pace or the next competition.

I simply looked around.

And it struck me how much of my training life is now rooted here in Kensington.

Apparatus training happens in gymnastics centres across London, currently mainly at Hendon Gymnastics Centre. But Holland Park, where I have trained outdoors for years, and Kensington Gardens have become equally important for running, strength, movement and recovery.

Neither park is a gymnastics centre in the conventional sense. They are open, living training grounds where nature and space help me build capacity, recover and prepare. Free to enter and close enough for consistent practice, they feel almost like a lifetime entrance to an open gym.

Here I can run, develop strength, practise handstands, regain energy and keep the daily rhythm of being a gymnast alive.

More than twenty years after I first entered gymnastics, perhaps that is what gymnastics for life increasingly means to me. The sport remains at the centre and I still practise the same fundamental movements; I simply no longer confine that practice to one specialist hall.

Because the gymnastics centre is not close to where I live, consistency depends on adaptation: I train responsibly wherever I can, then return to a properly equipped centre for apparatus skills and complete routines.

And my relationship with physical activity began in a very different place.

WHERE IT BEGAN

When movement was something I was told not to do

As a child, I was diagnosed with Perthes disease, a condition affecting the hip. At that stage of my life, the medical advice I received was not simply to avoid demanding sport. I was told not to practise physical activity and was prevented from participating in PE classes at school. I was also told that I might need one or more surgical interventions^[1].

Years later, when gymnastics entered my life, another barrier appeared.

I was 15.

I started gymnastics on 1 October 2002.

In gymnastics terms, that was very late to begin. By that age, many competitive gymnasts have already spent most of their childhood in the sport. Some people saw little point in me trying to progress seriously so late.

Yet something about being told that these doors were closed seemed to make me want to open them even more.

What followed was not a rapid journey towards elite success. It became something much more important to me:

I fell in love with the sport.

Training changed what I was physically capable of doing. I became stronger and more flexible. Movements that initially seemed impossible gradually became possible.

My life ultimately took a very different direction. As gymnastics became part of it, I experienced enormous changes in my strength, flexibility and physical capability.

PERSONAL ACCOUNT · NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

My experience should not be read as medical advice. Diagnoses, treatment decisions and restrictions on physical activity need to be considered individually with appropriately qualified professionals.

Gymnastics gave me something to work towards. Then something to study. Then something to teach. Eventually, it became the foundation for much of my professional and academic life.

Many gymnasts I knew were considerably better than me. Some reached national teams and levels I never reached. Over the decades, many people I once trained or competed alongside eventually stopped.

I have often seen competitive gymnastics treated as a chapter with a clear end: work towards a result, then move on when the goal has been reached, or when ageing, recovery demands and the risks of high-level training make the same path harder to justify. Some people continue general fitness in another form, but many leave gymnastics itself behind.

My own relationship with the sport developed differently. The longer I stayed, the more interesting gymnastics became. Other interests have sometimes faded, but the passion I felt when I started gymnastics has not. It remains the strongest and most enduring passion of my life.

That is not a refusal to acknowledge ageing, recovery or risk. It is a different understanding of lifelong gymnastics: the sport can be adapted so that it continues to belong in my life.

I continued.

Not because every year produced a medal. Not because my body always cooperated. And certainly not because gymnastics became easier.

I continued because the passion became stronger than the original goal.

RECENT YEARS · CONTINUING PRACTICE

Two parks, one continuing practice

Holland Park came first in this more recent chapter of the journey.

For years, its outdoor exercise area has been more than a place where I train outside the gymnastics gym. I carried rings and bars into the park, and a considerable share of my preparation happened there. In practice, Holland Park became one of my gymnastics training centres: an outdoor one, shaped by weather, seasons and the work that could be done responsibly in the space.

I still need a fully equipped professional gymnastics centre for complete routines and specialist apparatus work, especially before competitions. But the park makes consistency possible between those sessions.

Repeated training, changing seasons and different stages of my gymnastics life gradually made Holland Park part of the routine itself.

The photographs on this page were not created for this article. They come from ordinary training sessions across different years.

That is precisely why they matter.

FOUR YEARS IN HOLLAND PARK



2022 · Top planche
A top planche on the earlier outdoor parallel bars.



2024 · Beneath the trees
A handstand in Holland Park's outdoor gymnastics training ground.



2025 · Rings through winter
Assisted Maltese training with the Gymnastics Forza Ring System^[3].



2026 · Still on the rings
Maltese strength training with elastic-band assistance.

Personal training archive: Stefan Kolimechkov.

The seasons changed.
The equipment changed.
My training changed.
The place remained.

The outdoor gym changed too. I trained on the previous equipment for years; in October 2024, it was replaced with a new outdoor fitness area and calisthenics equipment. I trained there before the change, I returned after it, and I continue to use the new equipment today^[2].

That continuity is part of what makes Holland Park important to this story.

It is not somewhere I visited because I needed photographs for a magazine.

It has genuinely been one of my training grounds.

SAFETY NOTICE: Gymnastics skills should not be practised unsupervised. Many skills require qualified coaching, appropriate equipment, and a safe training environment. If you are unsure, focus on fundamentals and seek guidance from a qualified coach.

PLACE · MOVEMENT · HISTORY

Kensington Gardens



2025 · Kensington Gardens — A press to handstand on mini bars with the Albert Memorial behind: gymnastics placed directly into the Kensington landscape. *Personal training archive: Stefan Kolimechkov.*

Kensington Gardens has become the other half of that outdoor training landscape.

Here, the emphasis is somewhat different.

Running now has a deliberate place in my preparation. My 5K work develops aerobic and cardiorespiratory fitness alongside the very different strength, skill and technical demands of gymnastics^[6].

There is also space simply to move — and occasionally, inevitably, to do a handstand.

A photograph beside the Albert Memorial from 2025 captures that crossover particularly well: gymnastics taken out of the specialist facility and placed directly into one of Kensington's most recognisable landscapes.

Kensington Gardens developed from royal grounds associated with Kensington Palace. Much of the landscape visible today was shaped through successive royal schemes, including major eighteenth-century work under George II and Queen Caroline with Royal Gardener Charles Bridgeman. The gardens that were once principally royal space gradually became public^[4].

Today, people walk here. They run. Children play. Families meet. People sit beneath the trees or move through the park on their way across London.

And I can use the same landscape as part of preparing my body to continue competing in gymnastics.

The park is not scenery around the training. It has become part of the training.

That transformation — from royal landscape to public movement space — gives my runs here another dimension.

KENSINGTON NOTE · THE ROUND POND

The Round Pond is much more than an ornamental lake in front of Kensington Palace. An earlier rectangular body of water was enlarged into the form of the Round Pond between 1726 and 1728, during the transformation of Kensington Gardens associated with Charles Bridgeman. The formal avenues around it still reveal the geometry of that eighteenth-century landscape^[5].

Nearly three centuries later, it is one of the views I encounter during my runs. History does not make the kilometres easier. But it certainly makes the training ground difficult to take for granted.

*The park is not scenery around the training.
It has become part of the training.*

A CONTINUING JOURNEY

A life in gymnastics



“The point of this timeline is not how many things happened. It is that gymnastics never disappeared.”

A TRAINING SYSTEM · SEPTEMBER 2026

How I train now

SPECIFIC PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Some physical qualities are directly connected to gymnastics performance. For me, this includes the strength required for rings elements and the specific physical preparation supporting the skills and routines I am trying to maintain or improve.

AEROBIC PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Running remains the main element, especially 5K work. Across the years I have also used the rowing machine and, when access allows, swimming. These develop aerobic and cardiorespiratory capacity in forms that complement rather than imitate gymnastics^[6].

THE CENTRE

GYMNASTICS

TECHNICAL PREPARATION

Still rings are my principal competitive apparatus, so specialist sessions include routine work, skill maintenance and technical preparation in properly equipped gymnastics facilities. That is the part that cannot be recreated in a park.

GENERAL PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Not everything has to resemble a gymnastics skill. General strength and conditioning maintain a broader physical base — something I increasingly value both as a gymnast and as someone who simply wants to remain physically capable.

FLEXIBILITY & MOBILITY

Gymnastics requires positions and ranges of motion that do not maintain themselves. I continue to dedicate separate attention to flexibility and mobility — both for the demands of the sport and because maintaining movement quality matters increasingly to me as the years pass.

RECOVERY

Training in my late thirties is not the same as recovering at 18. Coaching, research, work, travel and normal life all sit alongside training. The question is no longer simply: How much can I do? Increasingly, it is: What can I do consistently enough to keep doing this for years?

DATED RECORD Training Snapshot · September 2026	
PRIMARY COMPETITIVE FOCUS Still rings	TECHNICAL PREPARATION Gymnastics-centre apparatus training
SPECIFIC PHYSICAL PREPARATION Gymnastics- and rings-specific strength	GENERAL PHYSICAL PREPARATION Strength and conditioning
AEROBIC PHYSICAL PREPARATION Running, especially 5K training; rowing machine; occasional swimming	MOVEMENT PREPARATION Flexibility and mobility
OUTDOOR TRAINING GROUNDS Holland Park · Kensington Gardens	LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE Keep gymnastics part of life for as long as possible.

A LIVED DEFINITION

What does gymnastics for life really mean?

Children enter gymnastics for many reasons.

Some will compete. A very small number will progress towards elite sport. Many will enjoy gymnastics for part of childhood and eventually move towards something else.

There is nothing wrong with any of those paths.

But there is another possibility that deserves more attention.

Gymnastics can change shape without disappearing.

A competitive gymnast may eventually become a recreational gymnast. A coach can remain an athlete. Apparatus training can coexist with running, strength work and outdoor movement. Competition can continue at Masters level. Goals can become larger, smaller or simply different.

The body changes too.

What feels easy at one age may require deliberate work at another. Recovery changes. Time becomes more complicated. Careers and responsibilities compete with training. Injuries and interruptions happen.

None of that automatically means the relationship with gymnastics has ended.

For me, this has become perhaps the most interesting experiment of all.

I do not know what my gymnastics will look like ten years from now. I certainly do not know what it will look like twenty years from now.

That uncertainty is one reason I want to document it.

There will hopefully be more competitions. There may be more medals. There will almost certainly be difficult periods, interrupted training and plans that change.

None of those things, on their own, will determine whether this experiment in lifelong gymnastics succeeds.

The more important question is whether I can keep moving, keep learning and keep finding a place for gymnastics as life changes around it.

When I think back to the child who could not participate in PE, there is something extraordinary about being able to ask that question at all.

I did not become the gymnast with the greatest results. Many people I trained and competed alongside achieved levels I never reached.

But more than twenty years after I started late, I am still here.

Still learning. Still training. Still competing on the still rings.

And perhaps most importantly, I love gymnastics now more than I did before.

That is the journey I want *The Kensington Gymnast* to document.

For now, part of it is being lived here — between the gymnastics centres of London, the outdoor training ground in Holland Park and the paths of Kensington Gardens.

This is The Kensington Gymnast. And this is where the record begins.

VERIFICATION · ARCHIVE RECORD

Sources & visual archive



September 2026 · Kensington Gardens — The Round Pond across an open public landscape. *Personal training archive: Stefan Kolimechkov.*

READING THE EVIDENCE

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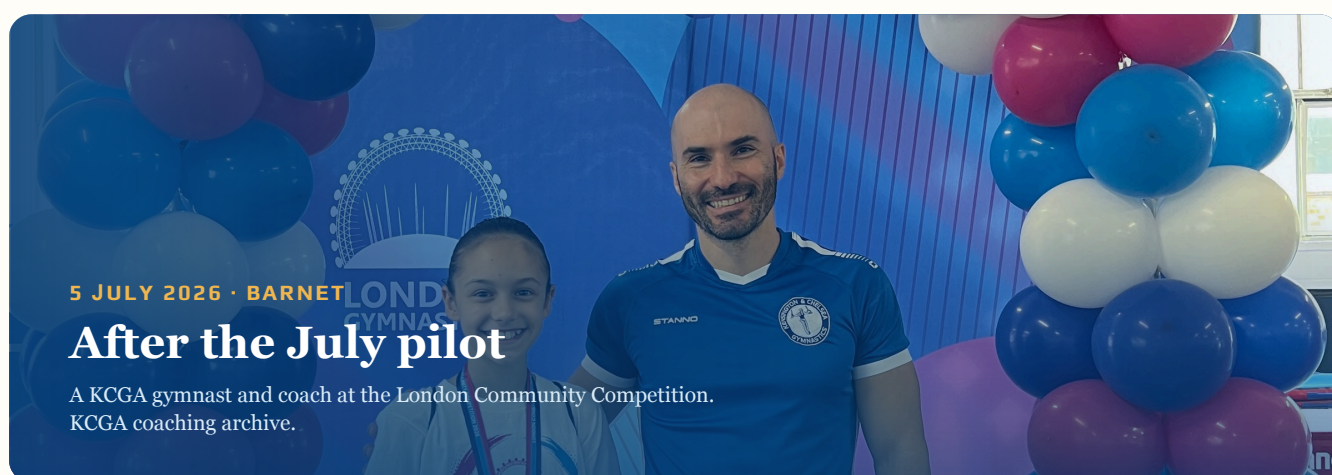
London & the World

Gymnastics in London

A New Competition Pathway for London

Can recreational gymnasts have a meaningful route into competition?

EXPERT VOICE | LORENZO RIBECCA · COMMUNITY TECHNICAL COMMITTEE CHAIR



Competition is not the destination of every gymnast.

Some children are happiest learning week by week, enjoying movement, friendships and the quiet satisfaction of doing something today that felt impossible a few months ago. Others become curious about competition: wearing club kit, performing in front of judges, sharing the floor with gymnasts from other clubs and discovering what it feels like to work towards a particular day.

Both experiences belong in gymnastics.

The important question is not whether every child should compete. It is whether a community gymnast who *wants* to compete can enter an experience that is appropriate, understandable and connected to what may come next.

A PATHWAY STILL TAKING SHAPE

From one event towards something connected

An isolated competition can still be enjoyable. It can provide a goal, a stage and a memorable day. But when the rules, skills and levels belong only to that one event, families and coaches may struggle to see the wider direction. What should the gymnast build next? Does one level prepare for another? Can the experience be repeated locally?

During 2026, London began testing one possible answer.

The **London Community Competition Programme** - titled *Community Competition Programme* in its June 2026 handbook and described there as a regional competition pathway delivered under London Gymnastics - has been designed to offer positive, inclusive and accessible competition opportunities for gymnasts at community and recreational level^[1].

That framework is not yet complete. On 5 July 2026, the **London Community Competition** took place at Anima Gymnastics Club in Barnet. It was a pilot or test event. There was no operating five-zone series, no zonal qualification system and no functioning zonal-to-Regional-Final pathway.

The five zones and Regional Final concept belong to what may be built next. KGM is documenting a programme at the point when an idea has entered the gym, met real children, coaches and families, and begun to reveal what it could become.

WHAT EXISTS NOW

- Current handbook and rules
- Eligibility and Community Levels
- One July 2026 pilot
- Committee oversight

WHAT IS BEING BUILT NEXT

- Five organisational zones
- More local opportunities
- Clearer routes for clubs and coaches
- A possible wider London structure

WHAT REMAINS AN AMBITION

- Regular opportunities in all zones
- Settled qualification mechanics
- An annual local-to-London rhythm
- Evidence that access has improved

KGM EDITORIAL POSITION

A pathway does not make competition compulsory. It makes the option more coherent for the children and families who choose it.

EXPERT LENS · PROGRAMME-DEVELOPMENT WITNESS

Where the idea began



WITH LORENZO RIBECCA

Lorenzo Ribecca chairs the Community Technical Committee named in the programme's June 2026 handbook. He co-founded Anima Gymnastics Club with Julianne Ribecca in 2018 and is the club's head coach.

Anima's current official profile describes him as an **International Men's Artistic Judge**; World Gymnastics also lists him within the 2025-2028 Men's Artistic international-judge course registrations^[2,3].

Lorenzo organised the July pilot and has been directly involved in developing the Community Levels and wider programme^[1,4,5].

Lorenzo Ribecca. Photograph supplied for KGM by Lorenzo Ribecca.

A question that started inside a club

The idea grew from a practical problem at Anima. Lorenzo and his colleagues were looking for suitable competitions for recreational gymnasts. Opportunities existed, but he felt that the connection between one event and a longer developmental route was often unclear.

“There were competitions available, but often it wasn't obvious how the skills or levels connected to anything beyond that particular event.

LORENZO RIBECCA^[5]

That experience led him to ask whether grassroots competition could be organised differently: not simply as a collection of routines for one day, but as part of a progressive framework in which the purpose of each level was easier for a coach, gymnast and family to understand.

KGM welcomes the growing attention now being given to recreational gymnastics. This matters especially because published research led by KGM editor Dr Stefan Kolimechkov has examined health-related physical fitness in primary-school children practising artistic and recreational gymnastics^[11,12]. KGM therefore welcomes seeing London's Community Competition Programme turn that attention into practice, with a structured competition pathway now being built for recreational gymnasts across the capital.

FROM A CLUB QUESTION TO A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

Moving the idea through London Gymnastics

Lorenzo identifies Maria McLoughlin, Chair of London Gymnastics, as a major source of support in developing the idea and moving it forward through the regional organisation. London Gymnastics is the Regional Governing Body for gymnastics and is affiliated to British Gymnastics^[5,6].

The current handbook now gives the programme a formal structure. It places oversight with the Community Technical Committee and defines rules concerning membership, age, training hours, levels, categories, coaches, judges, awards and the intended competition pathway^[1].

The July event then moved that structure from paper into practice.

Not a smaller version of elite competition

Lorenzo is clear that the programme is not based on the assumption that every community gymnast should eventually become a high-performance athlete.

Its deeper purpose is to make the gymnastics learned in a few weekly hours developmentally meaningful. A gymnast may remain within community gymnastics, progress through its levels, enjoy competition occasionally or never compete at all. Another gymnast may later show the ability, desire and opportunity to enter MAG, WAG or a different pathway.

The aim is not to predetermine that destination. It is to avoid making early gymnastics feel disconnected from what may follow.

“ It is about making sure the gymnastics they are learning still makes sense developmentally.

LORENZO RIBECCA^[5]

EVIDENCE LABELS USED IN THIS CHAPTER

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FACT Written in the current handbook or event work plan.	LORENZO FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT What he experienced developing or delivering the programme.	LORENZO PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION His judgement about need, purpose or practice.
FUTURE ASPIRATION What he hopes may be developed.	KGM PARTICIPATING-CLUB VIEW The editor's perspective through KCGA.	KGM EDITORIAL INTERPRETATION KGM's clearly labelled synthesis.

WHAT "COMMUNITY" MEANS HERE

Training hours affect eligibility - not ability

The word *community* can describe many forms of gymnastics. In this programme it also has a specific practical meaning.

The current handbook says that a gymnast must hold British Gymnastics Community membership, be at least seven during the competition year and train no more than four hours per week, calculated as an average across all gymnastics disciplines and all clubs attended^[1]. These requirements define entry to this framework. They do not define every recreational gymnast in London.

Eligibility

Who may enter this programme?

- Community membership
- Age seven or older in the competition year
- Maximum four average weekly gymnastics hours
- Total counted across disciplines and clubs
- Entry through an eligible London club



Level

Which competition framework is appropriate?

- The discipline being entered
- The gymnast's current skill content
- Relevant performance requirements
- The club's judgement that the level is appropriate

**TRAINING HOURS AFFECT ELIGIBILITY.
THEY DO NOT DETERMINE LEVEL BY THEMSELVES.**

Why four hours?

The four-hour limit is not a scientific dividing line. It does not suggest that a child training three hours lacks ability, or that a child training five hours is elite. Lorenzo explains it as a programme-design decision intended to preserve a recognisable community environment - broadly reflecting gymnasts attending once or twice each week rather than children with substantially greater training time.

COMMUNITY LEVELS

A pathway that gives training direction

The supplied handbook sets out four General Gymnastics Community Levels. Earlier levels use a shorter apparatus format; later levels introduce a broader apparatus choice. General Gymnastics uses a simplified Difficulty and Execution approach so that completed content and performance quality remain visible parts of the score^[1].

Acrobatic and Rhythmic Gymnastics use the relevant London discipline rules named in the handbook rather than rewritten Community skill lists.

KGM is deliberately not reproducing the detailed element lists. They belong within qualified club coaching and the governing rule documents, not in a family magazine as a remote training programme.

What families need to understand is the organising principle: a level should reflect what a gymnast is prepared to perform, and the levels are intended to connect.

That does not make the Community Levels equivalent to established national MAG or WAG pathways. It means that the developers have tried to borrow an underlying idea - sound foundations and connected progression - and make it realistic for gymnasts with fewer weekly training hours^[5].



Level, category and age ranking are not the same

LEVEL	COMPETITION CATEGORY	OVERALL AGE-GROUP RANKING
Discipline and performance requirements.	Normally groups gymnasts using age, ability and entry numbers.	Compiled separately for reference and intended qualification information.

All participants are intended to receive a certificate. The handbook provides medals for first to third within a category and ribbons for fourth to sixth, with all-around awards rather than separate apparatus medals^[1].

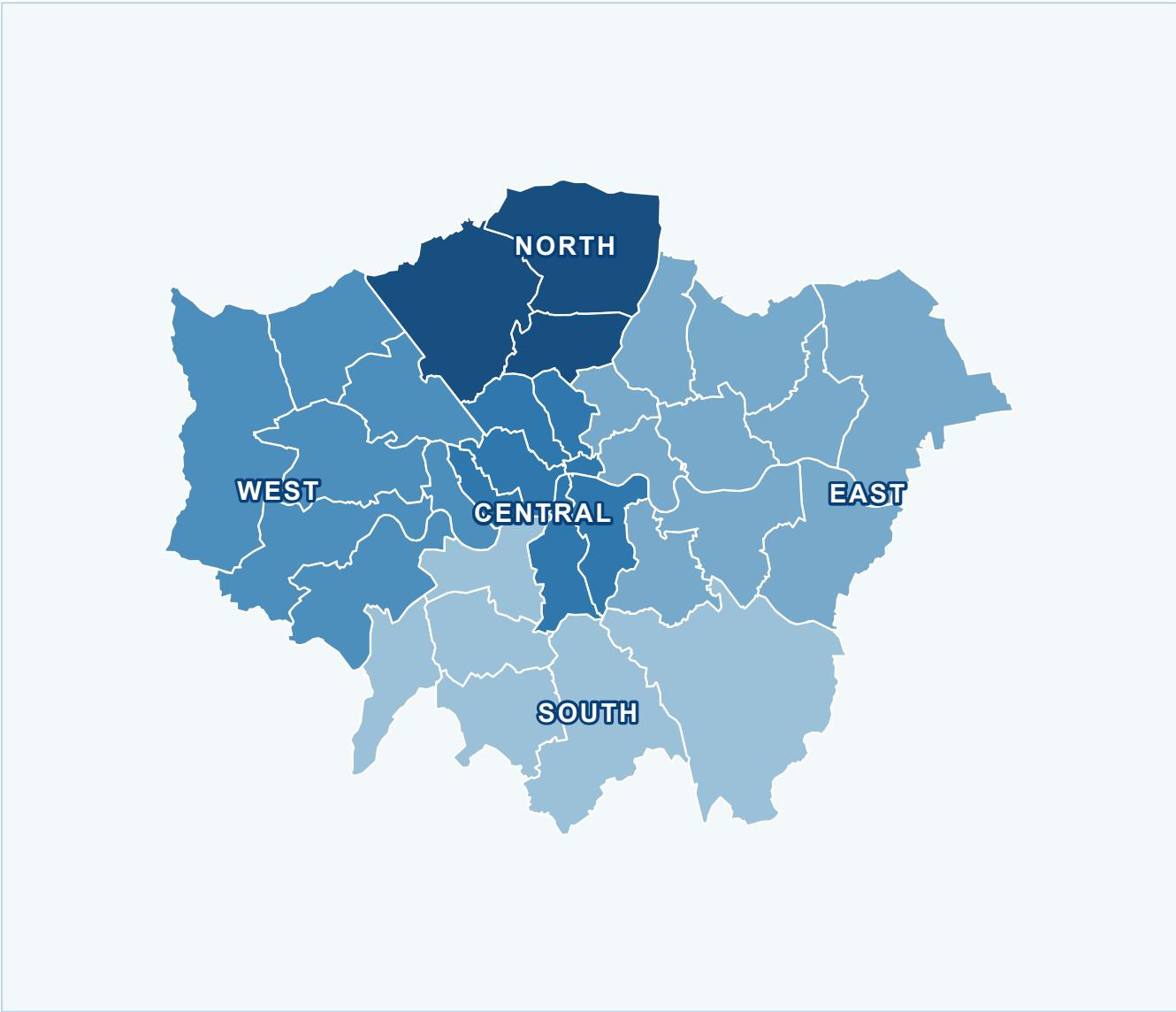
Participation and placing can both be recognised without pretending they mean the same thing. A child may value performing, completing a routine, representing a club, reaching a personal goal or earning a result. One medal should not become the only story.

MAJOR VISUAL · ORIGINAL KGM MAP

Five Zones · One Developing London Structure

DEVELOPING MODEL

London is too large to think about competition access as though every family begins from the same place. The programme's developing model divides the region into five organisational zones: **Central, East, North, South and West**^[1].



NORTH	WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	SOUTH
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WHAT THIS MAP MEANS The zones show the programme's developing organisational structure. They do not show provider density, gymnast numbers, current participation, equal access, travel time or competition frequency. Zonal competitions were not operating in 2026.

Programme allocation: *Community Competition Programme*, Version 2, June 2026^[1]. Borough boundaries: Greater London Authority / Ordnance Survey Boundary-Line^[7]. Original KGM graphic.

THE PROGRAMME IN TIME

A development sequence - not a qualification flowchart



A club in Barnet, a family in Greenwich and a gymnast in Kensington may all belong to the same region, but a journey across London can still carry substantial cost, time and practical difficulty.

The zones are an organisational geography: a possible way to create more local competition opportunities while retaining wider London events. They are not a claim that opportunity is equal inside each area.

Lorenzo's longer-term hope is that gymnasts might eventually have one or two zonal opportunities and one or two wider regional opportunities during a year^[5]. That is an aspiration, not a published calendar or current entitlement.

In September 2026, no operating five-zone competition series had taken place. The July pilot was open more widely and was not a zonal qualifier. The exact mechanics connecting future zone events with a Regional Final remain under development.

That uncertainty is part of the historical record.

READ THE SEQUENCE CORRECTLY

This visual records how the programme may develop over time. It does not show an operating route through which a gymnast currently qualifies from a zone to a Regional Final.

DATED DOCUMENTARY RECORD

5 July 2026 · The Pilot in Barnet

LONDON COMMUNITY COMPETITION

Pilot / test event

DATE

5 July 2026

VENUE

Anima Gymnastics Club · Barnet

ORGANISER

Lorenzo Ribecca

AROUND 140

GYMNASTS

Lorenzo first-hand account^[5]

APPROX. 300

SPECTATORS

Lorenzo first-hand account^[5]

The event work plan records a full competition operation: organiser, judging coordination, welfare, first aid, health and safety, scoring, club accreditation and coach/judge requirements^[4]. Public Gyndata pages independently record the event name, date and host venue^[8].

ONE EVENT · SEVERAL QUESTIONS

What was being tested?

LIVE LEVELS

Could the proposed levels work in a real competition?

EVENT OPERATION

Could the competition be staffed, judged and scored effectively?

RULES AND GROUPING

Were the rules and category arrangements workable?

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

How would gymnasts, coaches and families respond?

What the public record confirms

Public result pages reviewed by KGM confirm competition activity at Levels 2 and 4^[9,10]. They are used here as documentary checks, not as a reconstructed account of the complete field.

The results also show how the programme's levels appeared in practice: shorter floor-and-vault formats at earlier levels and broader apparatus formats in later groups.

What Lorenzo says was learned

Lorenzo's assessment is that there was nothing fundamental about the levels, rules or grouping that made the organisers believe the concept was wrong. The main learning concerned logistics - particularly making the first round run more smoothly - and smaller organisational refinements^[5].

He also reports that the response from gymnasts, parents and coaches was more positive than he expected and that there appeared to be genuine appetite for further opportunities^[5].

That is valuable first-hand testimony. It is not a formal participant survey or evidence of long-term programme success.

PARTICIPATING-CLUB PERSPECTIVE · KENSINGTON & CHELSEA GYMNASTICS

KCGA took part in the pilot. Editor Stefan Kolimechkov leads the club and is considering the programme as a principal annual competition route for suitable gymnasts. The attraction is a clearer event to work towards and a more connected developmental direction - not simply the possibility of medals.

KGM DISCLOSURE The editor leads Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics, which participated in the July 2026 pilot. This is a participating-club perspective, not independent evidence that the programme is superior or successful.

BEYOND ONE COMPETITION

A structure for coaches as well as children

The pilot tested a competition. The larger ambition is to build an environment in which community gymnastics has clearer direction. That would involve more than gymnasts.

The programme already requires qualified coaches, relevant judges, standardised rules and committee oversight^[1]. These are delivery requirements. They do not prove that coaching quality has improved.

Lorenzo's hope is that the progressive structure can also influence the questions coaches ask. Instead of preparing a child only for the skills listed in the next event, a coach might think more deliberately about foundations, prerequisites, how one skill connects with another and what should come next^[5].

Longer term, Lorenzo sees possibilities for workshops, shared knowledge, communication between clubs and more competition experience for coaches and judges^[5]. Those remain aspirations unless and until they are formally implemented.

The programme requires

- qualified coaching and judging;
- staffing responsibilities;
- standardised programme and discipline rules;
- eligibility checks and appropriate entries;
- safeguarding and event-governance processes^[1,4].

Lorenzo believes it can encourage

- clearer thinking about foundations;
- understanding why a skill is taught;
- better awareness of prerequisites;
- longer-term curriculum direction;
- future learning between clubs^[5].

Designed to improve access - not proof that access is equal

Several features are intended to make community competition more understandable and reachable: a clear eligibility rule, multiple levels, age- and ability-aware categories, disability categories where applicable, simplified General Gymnastics scoring, participation certificates and the developing five-zone structure^[1].

But London barriers do not disappear because a framework exists. Clubs have different facilities, equipment, staffing, finances and access to judges. Families face different journeys, costs and available time. Affiliation, membership and qualification rules create important standards, but also require resources.

The programme can therefore be described as **designed to improve accessibility**. It cannot yet be described as having made community competition accessible across London.

FOUR VALID OUTCOMES · NO LADDER

Competition should remain an invitation, not an obligation

COMMUNITY GYMNASTICS A child may enjoy weekly gymnastics without competing.	COMMUNITY COMPETITION A child may compete and remain happily within this pathway.	PROGRESS THROUGH LEVELS A child may build connected experience over time.	EXPLORE ANOTHER PATHWAY Where ability, desire and opportunity align, MAG, WAG or another route may be considered.
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The fourth is not the only successful ending.

Lorenzo would like the Community Levels to become widely understood across London, with clubs in all five zones able to reach regular opportunities. He also hopes the programme may help develop more coaches and judges and strengthen communication between clubs^[5].

In September 2026, the historical record remains one pilot event and a developing framework.

For the family

A first competition does not decide whether a child will become an elite gymnast. It can simply be a chance to work towards something, perform what has been learned, represent a club and feel proud of progress. For other children, weekly gymnastics without competition remains exactly the right experience.

London has not yet completed this route. But the pilot moved the question beyond theory. The rules were tried, gymnasts competed and the programme's developers now have something real to refine.

FINAL THOUGHT
A better pathway does not narrow gymnastics to medals - it gives families a clearer route when competition is the experience a child wants to explore.

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EDITORIAL EVIDENCE NOTE This chapter distinguishes current programme documents, Lorenzo Rebecca's first-hand account and professional interpretation, future aspiration, KGM's participating-club view and KGM editorial interpretation. The July figures are contributor-reported, not audited attendance statistics. The five-zone visual records developing organisational geography, not current provision or equal access.

London & the World

The World of Gymnastics

Inside the European Championships

Zagreb 2026, the history behind Europe's artistic gymnastics championships—and what a judge, coach and academic sees from within.

EXPERT VOICE | DR ILIYA YANEV · JUDGE · COACH · ACADEMIC

Six routines. Two totals. One thousandth of a point. At the 2026 men's European Championships in Zagreb, Illia Kovtun finished the all-around with **82.833**. Arsenii Dukhno finished with **82.832**^[17].

The official result did not identify one isolated wobble, landing or judging decision as the cause. It showed something more useful: a gymnastics total is built, decision by decision and deduction by deduction, across an entire competition^[22].

This chapter looks beyond who won. It follows the event's two historical tracks, opens the machinery behind a men's score and listens to what a judge, coach and academic sees from within.

Building the series

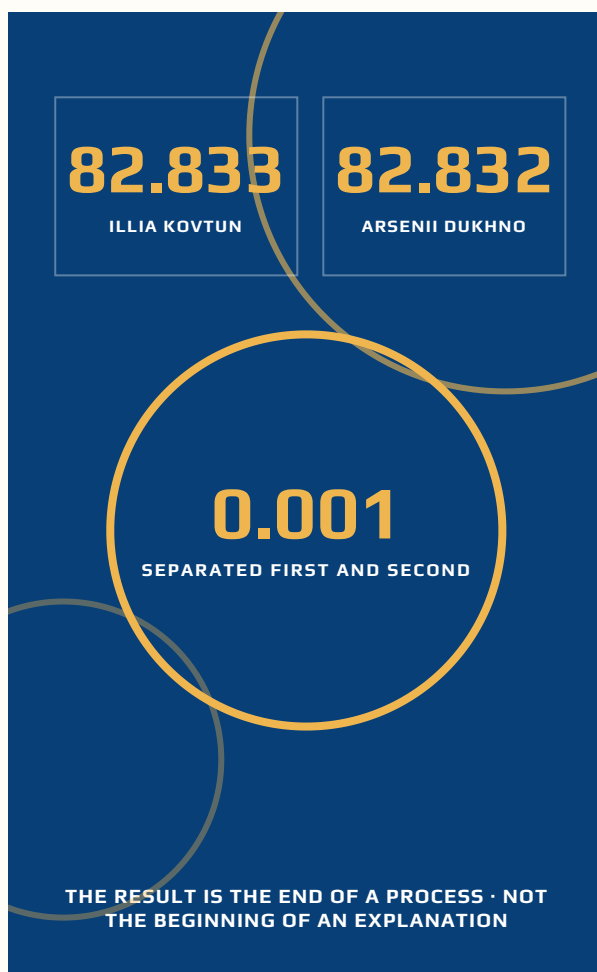
Issue 1 · The world stage

Issue 2 · Why gymnastics superpowers emerge

Issue 3 · How children begin around the world

Issue 4 · Two great apparatus traditions

Issue 5 · Inside the European Championships



THE NUMBER THAT OPENS THE DOOR

One thousandth

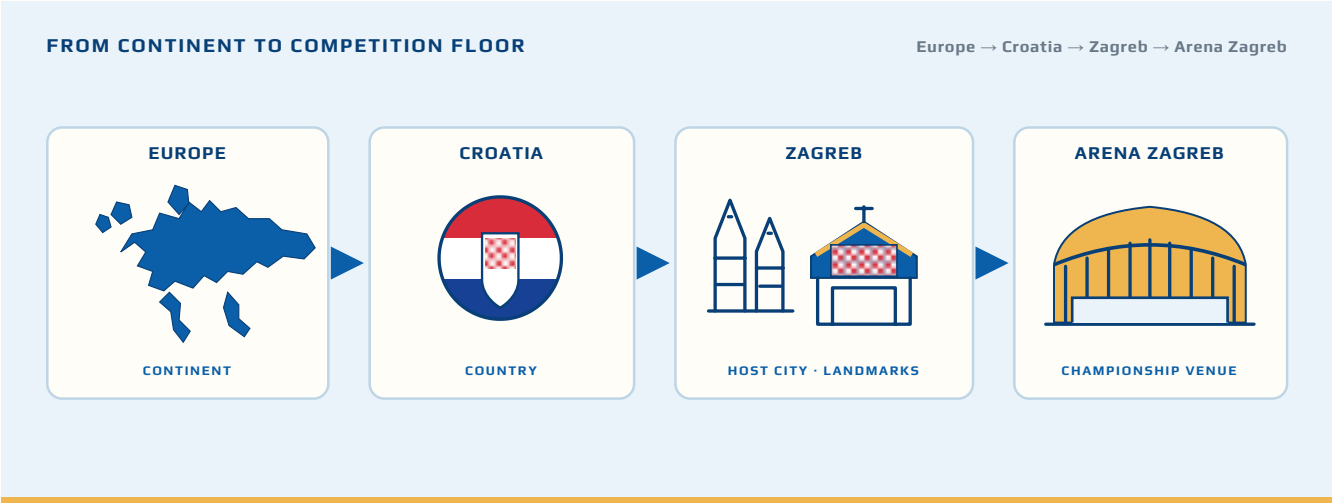


For families watching on a screen, the final number can look as if it has simply appeared. It has not. Difficulty must be recognised. Requirements and connections must be checked. Execution faults must be assessed independently. Neutral deductions may apply. Across six apparatus, each final routine score becomes one part of the all-around total^[19].

The 0.001 at the top of the men’s all-around does not make gymnastics arbitrary. It makes the construction of a score visible. Behind each total are routines, rules, independent observations and accumulated work.

0.001 DOES NOT IDENTIFY ONE CAUSE.
The official all-around record establishes the two totals. KGM does not infer that one particular deduction, element or judge caused the final difference^[17].

Zagreb is therefore a useful place to look inside a European Championships: not to search for one dramatic explanation, but to understand the many layers that create a result.



ONE VENUE · TWO DISCIPLINE PROGRAMMES

What are “the Europeans”?

The European Artistic Gymnastics Championships are continental championships organised within European Gymnastics. Men’s artistic gymnastics (MAG) and women’s artistic gymnastics (WAG) have their own histories, apparatus and competition formats. Calling them simply “the Europeans” is convenient, but their record is not one continuous, identical event^[1].

In 2026, Zagreb hosted the women’s championships at Arena Zagreb from 13 to 16 August and the men’s championships from 19 to 23 August^[11, 12].

Women’s Artistic ^[13, 15]			
13–16 August 2026			
293	39	163	130
GYMNASTS	FEDERATIONS	SENIORS	JUNIORS
SENIOR ALL-AROUND · TOP THREE ^[18]			
1	WG2	Angelina Melnikova	55.932
2	WG2	Anna Kalmykova	54.632
3		Elena Colas	53.966
SENIOR TEAM · TOP THREE ^[21]			
1	WG2	World Gymnastics 2	165.430
2		Italy	161.796
3		France	159.263

Men’s Artistic ^[16]			
19–23 August 2026			
333	40	185	148
GYMNASTS	FEDERATIONS	SENIORS	JUNIORS
SENIOR ALL-AROUND · TOP THREE ^[22]			
1		Illia Kovtun	82.833
2	WG2	Arsenii Dukhno	82.832
3	WG2	Daniel Marinov	81.899
SENIOR TEAM · TOP THREE ^[17]			
1		Great Britain	246.728
2	WG2	World Gymnastics 2	246.158
3		Switzerland	242.094

WHAT WG2 MEANS

WG2 means World Gymnastics 2. At Zagreb 2026 it was the neutral administrative designation used for the Russian delegation^[21, 27].

WHY THE RUSSIAN FLAG IS NOT SHOWN

The transitional arrangement replaced the normal Russian country code, flag and anthem. A neutral WG2 badge therefore follows the official competition record; adding the Russian flag beside these results would contradict that published designation.

A VERIFIED SELECTIVE MILESTONE RECORD

Two beginnings, not one

MAG TRACK

WAG TRACK

1955

MAG · Frankfurt, West Germany

The first men’s European Championships in the official European Gymnastics history^[1, 2].

1957

WAG · Bucharest, Romania

The first women’s event in the official archive^[3].

1994

MAG · Prague, Czech Republic

Final individual-format edition before official team results appear in 1996^[5, 7].

1994

WAG · Stockholm, Sweden

Final individual-format edition before official team results appear in 1996^[4, 6].

1996

MAG/WAG · Denmark and Great Britain

Official result books document senior team competition in both discipline-specific championships^[6, 7].

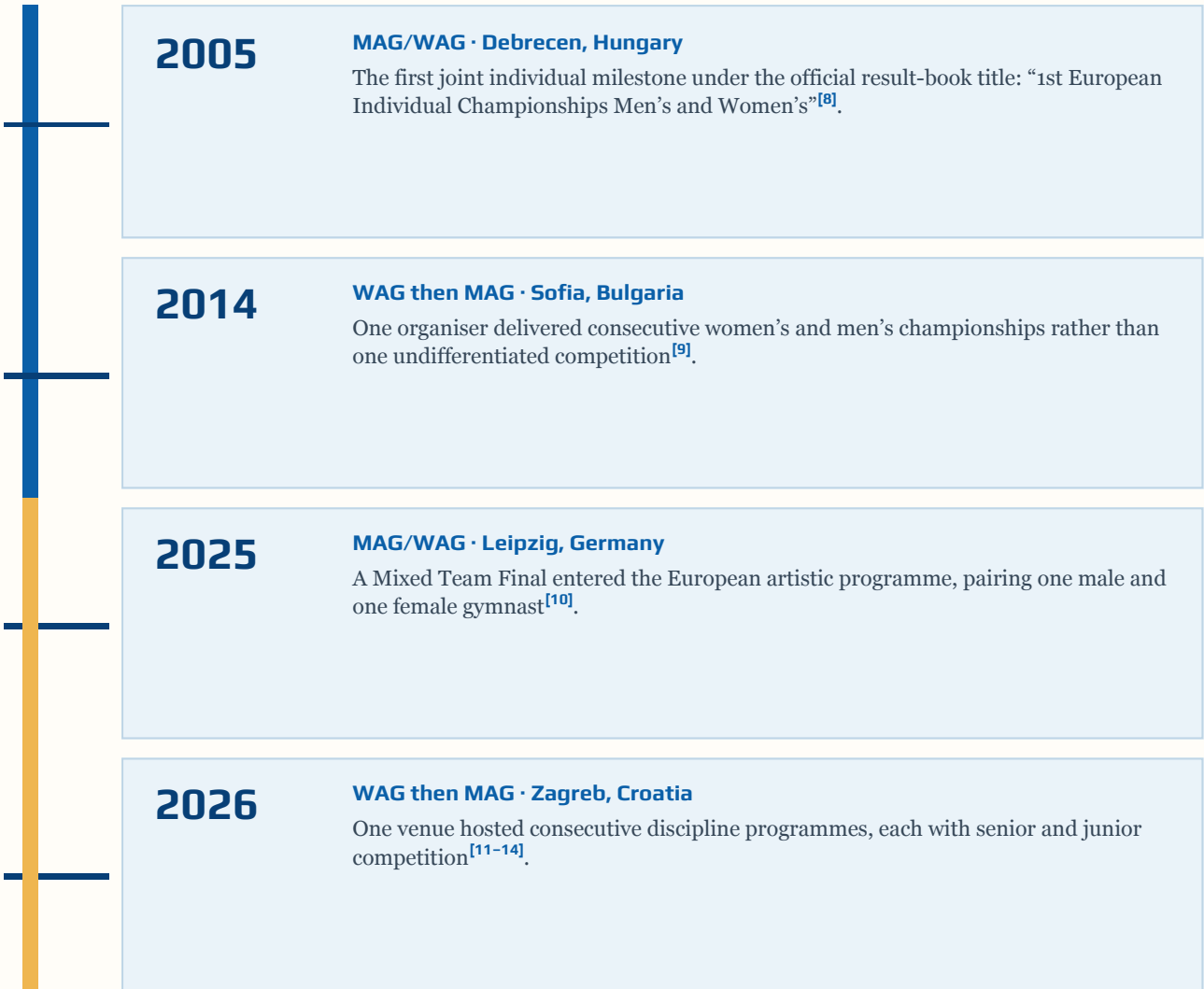
The two starting points prevent a neat but false story in which one championship began once and merely grew. MAG and WAG developed on parallel tracks and later shared organisers and formats at particular moments.

The official record uses three related but distinct senior sequences: men’s championships, women’s championships and the joint senior individual series introduced in 2005. KGM therefore keeps their edition numbers separate rather than forcing them into one artificial chronology.

SEPARATE TRACKS · SELECTED POINTS OF CONNECTION

The championship kept changing

MAG TRACK WAG TRACK



Zagreb belongs to a history of changing structures rather than a single fixed event. That history includes separate beginnings, new team formats, joint individual editions, consecutive programmes and a Mixed Team Final.

These milestone pages interpret verified transitions. The complete record that follows lists every edition in the men’s, women’s and joint senior individual sequences through 2026.

HISTORICAL WORDING CONTROL

1994 is not described as the start of a “team era”. It is the final individual-format edition in each track before official team results appear in 1996.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When families hear “the Europeans”, they are hearing a convenient name for a history that has never been completely simple.

EVERY SENIOR EDITION · THREE OFFICIAL SEQUENCES

Why the record needs three tables

A single blended list would hide the way the championships developed. The men’s sequence begins in 1955; the women’s begins in 1957. Their numbering remains separate even when the same organiser and city hosted both disciplines.

A third sequence began in 2005 for joint senior individual championships. Its own numbering reached the 11th edition at Leipzig 2025. These editions belong in the history, but they do not replace the discipline-specific MAG and WAG sequences^[8, 29].

37

MEN’S EDITIONS

Frankfurt 1955
to Zagreb 2026

36

WOMEN’S EDITIONS

Bucharest 1957
to Zagreb 2026

11

JOINT SENIOR EDITIONS

Debrecen 2005
to Leipzig 2025

Odd-year individual roots

Separate MAG and WAG beginnings



Discipline-specific series

Teams, apparatus and juniors evolved



Annual rhythm

Joint senior individual and discipline programmes alternate

HOW TO READ THE FLAGS

The flag is a compact visual locator. The written host-state name controls the historical record, including West Germany, East Germany, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. City names use familiar modern English forms.

EDITION WORDING

Series numbers are applied within their own official sequence. Historical event titles varied, especially in the joint senior series; the tables preserve that distinction rather than presenting one uninterrupted “European Championships” count.

MEN'S ARTISTIC · EDITIONS 1–19

Every men's championship · part one

NO.	YEAR	HOST STATE	CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES NAME
1	1955	 West Germany	Frankfurt am Main	1st European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
2	1957	 France	Paris	2nd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
3	1959	 Denmark	Copenhagen	3rd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
4	1961	 Luxembourg	Luxembourg	4th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
5	1963	 Yugoslavia	Belgrade	5th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
6	1965	 Belgium	Antwerp	6th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
7	1967	 Finland	Tampere	7th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
8	1969	 Poland	Warsaw	8th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
9	1971	 Spain	Madrid	9th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
10	1973	 France	Grenoble	10th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
11	1975	 Switzerland	Bern	11th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
12	1977	 Soviet Union	Vilnius	12th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
13	1979	 West Germany	Essen	13th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
14	1981	 Italy	Rome	14th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
15	1983	 Bulgaria	Varna	15th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
16	1985	 Norway	Oslo	16th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
17	1987	 Soviet Union	Moscow	17th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
18	1989	 Sweden	Stockholm	18th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
19	1990	 Switzerland	Lausanne	19th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships

Record method. Edition sequence, host state and city are reconciled against the European Gymnastics event archive and official result books, with the historical lists independently cross-checked^[28, 29, 30, 31]. Host-state names follow the period of the championship; modern English city forms are used.

MEN'S ARTISTIC · EDITIONS 20–37

Every men's championship · part two

NO.	YEAR	HOST STATE	CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES NAME
20	1992	 Hungary	Budapest	20th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
21	1994	 Czech Republic	Prague	21st European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
22	1996	 Denmark	Brøndby	22nd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
23	1998	 Russia	Saint Petersburg	23rd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
24	2000	 Germany	Bremen	24th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
25	2002	 Greece	Patras	25th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
26	2004	 Slovenia	Ljubljana	26th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
27	2006	 Greece	Volos	27th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
28	2008	 Switzerland	Lausanne	28th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
29	2010	 United Kingdom	Birmingham	29th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
30	2012	 France	Montpellier	30th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
31	2014	 Bulgaria	Sofia	31st European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
32	2016	 Switzerland	Bern	32nd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
33	2018	 United Kingdom	Glasgow	33rd European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
34	2020	 Türkiye	Mersin	34th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
35	2022	 Germany	Munich	35th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
36	2024	 Italy	Rimini	36th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
37	2026	 Croatia	Zagreb	37th European Men's Artistic Gymnastics Championships

Record method. Edition sequence, host state and city are reconciled against the European Gymnastics event archive and official result books, with the historical lists independently cross-checked^[28, 29, 30, 31]. Host-state names follow the period of the championship; modern English city forms are used.

WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EDITIONS 1–18

Every women's championship · part one

NO.	YEAR	HOST STATE	CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES NAME
1	1957	 Romania	Bucharest	1st European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
2	1959	 Poland	Kraków	2nd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
3	1961	 East Germany	Leipzig	3rd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
4	1963	 France	Paris	4th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
5	1965	 Bulgaria	Sofia	5th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
6	1967	 Netherlands	Amsterdam	6th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
7	1969	 Sweden	Landskrona	7th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
8	1971	 Soviet Union	Minsk	8th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
9	1973	 United Kingdom	London	9th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
10	1975	 Norway	Skien	10th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
11	1977	 Czechoslovakia	Prague	11th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
12	1979	 Denmark	Copenhagen	12th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
13	1981	 Spain	Madrid	13th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
14	1983	 Sweden	Gothenburg	14th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
15	1985	 Finland	Helsinki	15th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
16	1987	 Soviet Union	Moscow	16th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
17	1989	 Belgium	Brussels	17th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
18	1990	 Greece	Piraeus	18th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships

Record method. Edition sequence, host state and city are reconciled against the European Gymnastics event archive and official result books, with the historical lists independently cross-checked^[28, 29, 30, 31]. Host-state names follow the period of the championship; modern English city forms are used.

WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EDITIONS 19–36

Every women's championship · part two

NO.	YEAR	HOST STATE	CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES NAME
19	1992	 France	Nantes	19th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
20	1994	 Sweden	Stockholm	20th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
21	1996	 United Kingdom	Birmingham	21st European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
22	1998	 Russia	Saint Petersburg	22nd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
23	2000	 France	Paris	23rd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
24	2002	 Greece	Patras	24th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
25	2004	 Netherlands	Amsterdam	25th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
26	2006	 Greece	Volos	26th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
27	2008	 France	Clermont-Ferrand	27th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
28	2010	 United Kingdom	Birmingham	28th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
29	2012	 Belgium	Brussels	29th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
30	2014	 Bulgaria	Sofia	30th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
31	2016	 Switzerland	Bern	31st European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
32	2018	 United Kingdom	Glasgow	32nd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
33	2020	 Türkiye	Mersin	33rd European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
34	2022	 Germany	Munich	34th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
35	2024	 Italy	Rimini	35th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
36	2026	 Croatia	Zagreb	36th European Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships

Record method. Edition sequence, host state and city are reconciled against the European Gymnastics event archive and official result books, with the historical lists independently cross-checked^[28, 29, 30, 31]. Host-state names follow the period of the championship; modern English city forms are used.

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S · EDITIONS 1–11

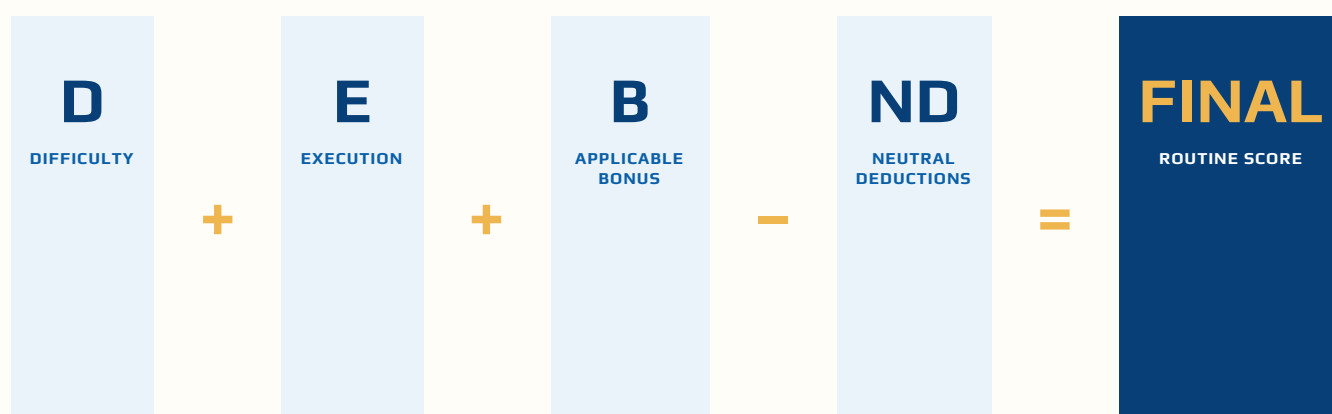
Every joint senior individual championship

NO.	YEAR	HOST STATE	CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES NAME
1	2005	 Hungary	Debrecen	1st European Individual Championships — Men's & Women's
2	2007	 Netherlands	Amsterdam	2nd European Individual Championships — Men's & Women's
3	2009	 Italy	Milan	3rd European Artistic Gymnastics Individual Championships
4	2011	 Germany	Berlin	4th European Artistic Gymnastics Individual Championships
5	2013	 Russia	Moscow	5th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
6	2015	 France	Montpellier	6th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
7	2017	 Romania	Cluj-Napoca	7th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
8	2019	 Poland	Szczecin	8th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
9	2021	 Switzerland	Basel	9th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Individual Championships
10	2023	 Türkiye	Antalya	10th European Men's & Women's Artistic Gymnastics Championships
11	2025	 Germany	Leipzig	11th Senior European Championships — Artistic Gymnastics

Record method. Edition sequence, host state and city are reconciled against the European Gymnastics event archive and official result books, with the historical lists independently cross-checked^[28, 29, 30, 31]. Host-state names follow the period of the championship; modern English city forms are used.

A FAMILY EXPLAINER · 2025–2028 MEN'S CODE

How a men's score is built



D · RECOGNISED CONTENT

Difficulty values, required element groups and eligible connections. A skill too far from its required form may not receive the expected value^[19].

E · QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE

The E-score begins from 10.00. Execution judges record deductions independently for aesthetic, execution, technical and composition faults.

B · APPLICABLE BONUS

A bonus is shown separately when the MAG rules award one. Not every routine receives a bonus.

ND · SPECIFIED DEDUCTIONS

Neutral deductions may apply for matters such as time, line, behaviour or a short exercise where relevant.

For Zagreb's men's competition, the family-level model begins with these connected parts. The D-jury evaluates the content of the exercise. The E-panel evaluates execution through independent deductions. The final number brings those decisions together^[19].

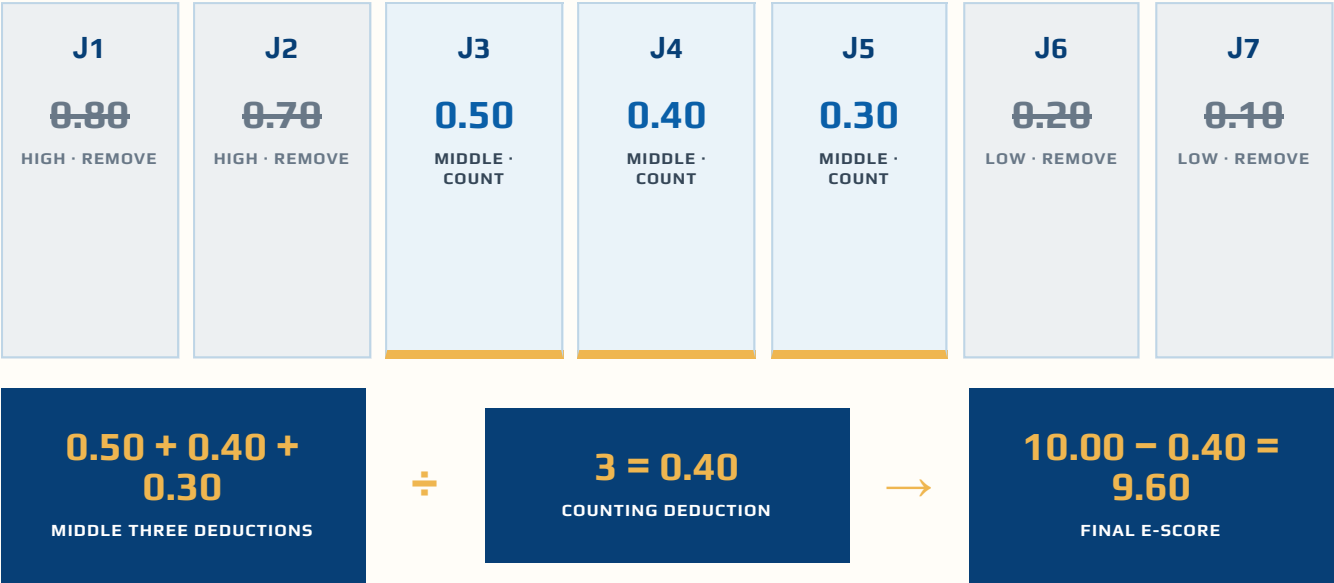
Vault finals are a special case because two vault scores are averaged for the ranking. Apparatus-specific rules still matter, even when the family equation remains useful^[17, 19].

SCOPE NOTE

This graphic explains Zagreb MAG at family level under the 2025–2028 Men's Artistic Gymnastics Code. It is not a substitute for apparatus rules, the WAG Code or every competition phase.

THE PANEL CALCULATION MADE VISIBLE

Seven deductions become one E-score



Illustrative numbers only. The method is the point: remove two highest and two lowest deduction totals, then average the middle three^[19].

“A judge’s work begins long before the first gymnast reaches the apparatus.”

DR ILIYA YANEV · JUDGE LENS

Yanev describes briefings, technical meetings, study of the current Code and official clarifications, and video examples used to align how judges apply the rules. On the competition floor, the task is not merely knowing the Code. It is making decisions quickly and applying the same standard across long days^[24].

Fatigue is part of the professional reality. Hours of close attention can make it harder to preserve the same criterion. That does not excuse inconsistency. It explains why preparation, panel structures, supervision and concentration management matter.

JUDGE

OFFICIAL PANEL RECORD

The Zagreb men’s result book confirms Yanev as D2 on junior still rings and as an E judge on junior and senior parallel bars and senior floor in specified phases^[17].

For families, the central correction is simple. A score is not one person saying, “I liked it.” Human interpretation remains, but the system is designed to limit the influence of any one execution judgement.

ONE CONTRIBUTOR · THREE PROFESSIONAL LENSES

What changes when you see the event from within?



Dr Iliya Yanev, international men's artistic gymnastics judge, coach and academic. Portrait supplied by Dr Yanev.

Dr Iliya Yanev is an Associate Professor in the Department of Gymnastics at the National Sports Academy “Vassil Levski” in Sofia, an international men's artistic gymnastics judge and the personal coach of Bulgarian gymnast Daniel Trifonov^[23, 26].

His answers are used as first-hand professional testimony and interpretation. Official championship facts are checked independently against European Gymnastics and FIG records.

JUDGE

What the Code asks, how a panel works and what consistency demands before and during competition.

COACH

What must be stable, repeatable and adaptable when an athlete has one competitive attempt.

ACADEMIC

What measurement can clarify - and where data cannot replace years of knowledge of the individual gymnast.

BEFORE THE FIRST ROUTINE

As a judge, Yanev sees the layers before a score: Code study, technical alignment, long attention and the responsibility to apply one criterion across many routines.

THE RELATIONSHIP DISCLOSURE

Dr Iliya Yanev and editor Dr Stefan Kolimechkov have previously co-authored academic gymnastics research. Yanev contributed first-hand professional answers to this chapter. His interpretations remain attributed^[24, 25].

THE ORGANISING PRINCIPLE

Official records establish dates, formats, results and panel assignments. The contributor explains what judging, coaching and academic work can mean in practice.

COACH

DIFFICULTY THAT CAN SURVIVE PRESSURE

The hardest routine on paper is not automatically the best one

“The aim is not the hardest possible routine on paper. It is the routine that gives the gymnast the best realistic chance of the highest final score.”

DR ILIYA YANEV · PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

1

REPEATABILITY

2

INTELLIGENT
ROUTINE
CONSTRUCTION

3

PHYSICAL READINESS

4

PSYCHOLOGICAL
RESET

5

ADAPTABILITY

A skill's listed difficulty is only potential. It becomes useful when the gymnast can place it inside a routine, repeat it under pressure and absorb the physical and psychological demands of the full competition.

In the final weeks before Zagreb, Yanev says the emphasis with Daniel Trifonov was on stabilising routines, managing load and recovery, and refining landings, rhythm, consistency and confidence. He also reports injuries and limitations in the preparation. KGM records that first-hand context without offering a medical interpretation^[24].

Daniel Trifonov · a verified competition step

10th / 8th

OVERALL / ELIGIBLE VAULT
QUALIFIER · 14.016

5th

VAULT FINAL · 14.050 AVERAGE

13th

PARALLEL-BARS QUALIFICATION ·
13.833

The official record gives the coach's reflection a firm result underneath it. Trifonov advanced to the vault final as the eighth eligible gymnast after the two-per-federation rule was applied. His final average came from 13.900 and 14.200^[17].

Yanev calls Zagreb an important stage rather than the destination. His interpretation is that the vault performance showed European-level potential and that the next task is to make it more stable and repeatable on the way towards the World Championships^[24].

FACT AND INTERPRETATION

Fifth place is official championship fact. What it means for the athlete's future is the coach's professional judgement.

Science with practice

“The most useful model is not science or practice. It is science with practice.”

DR ILIYA YANEV · ACADEMIC LENS

Biomechanics can describe technique and movement more precisely. Physiology and training theory can inform how coaches think about load, recovery and physical development. Sport psychology can help frame attention and response under pressure. Video and motion-tracking can turn some observations into measurable information^[24].

But data may show what is happening without automatically deciding what is best for one gymnast at one moment. An experienced coach knows the athlete’s responses, history, confidence and fatigue in ways that cannot be reduced to one measure.

What Zagreb recorded

Men’s Artistic ^[17, 22]			
SENIOR ALL-AROUND			
1		Illia Kovtun	82.833
2	WG2	Arsenii Dukhno	82.832
3	WG2	Daniel Marinov	81.899
SENIOR TEAM FINAL			
1		Great Britain	246.728
2	WG2	World Gymnastics 2	246.158
3		Switzerland	242.094

Women’s Artistic ^[18, 21]			
SENIOR ALL-AROUND			
1	WG2	Angelina Melnikova	55.932
2	WG2	Anna Kalmykova	54.632
3		Elena Colas	53.966
SENIOR TEAM FINAL			
1	WG2	World Gymnastics 2	165.430
2		Italy	161.796
3		France	159.263

Senior medal record. These are the complete all-around and team podiums from Zagreb 2026. WG2 remains the official neutral designation used in the published championship record.

TEN APPARATUS TITLES · TEN CHAMPIONSHIP PERFORMANCES

Zagreb's apparatus champions^[17, 20]

Each card records the senior gymnast who won the European title on that apparatus, together with the score that secured gold. Full names are retained so that every champion is properly recognised.

10

SENIOR APPARATUS CHAMPIONS



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Artem Dolgopyat

Floor exercise · 14.466



WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Angelina Melnikova

Vault · 14.166

WG2



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Gabriele Targhetta

Pommel horse · 15.133



WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Helen Kevric

Uneven bars · 14.500



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Artur Avetisyan

Still rings · 14.400 · tie-break



WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Elena Colas

Balance beam · 13.933



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Nazar Chepurnyi

Vault · 14.566



WOMEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Manila Esposito

Floor exercise · 13.700



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Illia Kovtun

Parallel bars · 14.700



MEN'S ARTISTIC · EUROPEAN CHAMPION

Joe Fraser

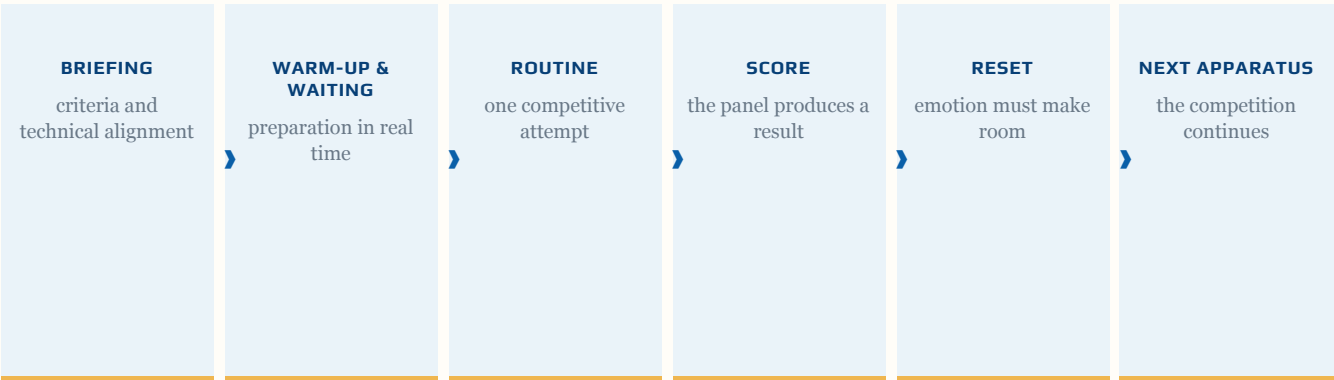
Horizontal bar · 14.300



European champion identifies the winner of the senior apparatus final at Zagreb 2026. The score shown is the official final score recorded for the title.

THE WORK THE AUDIENCE DOES NOT SEE

Just behind the competition floor



“If I had five minutes with a family, I would take them just behind the competition floor.”

DR ILIYA YANEV

That is where gymnasts wait, warm up, make final corrections and manage tension. It is also where the television picture narrows: years of preparation become a short routine, followed quickly by another apparatus and another demand for attention.

The backstage lesson is not that elite pressure should be imitated by every child. It is that performance contains work the audience cannot see. After an excellent routine or a disappointing one, the athlete has little time to remain inside the emotion.

A FAMILY TAKEAWAY

Progress is not only learning a harder skill. It is also learning how to prepare, how to repeat good work, how to reset and how to ask for the right support.

A EUROPEAN TITLE - AND A LONGER JOURNEY

A European final is a major international achievement. A title records the best performance in that event at that championship. Yet even at this level, the result is one point on a longer path.

The history of the championships is also a history of change. The format evolves. The central challenge remains: build difficulty, execute it with quality and be ready when the moment arrives.

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

The 0.001 does not reduce gymnastics to a number. It reveals the structure behind one: routines, rules, independent observations and the accumulated work of athletes, coaches and judges.

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Understanding the Sport

The Language of Gymnastics

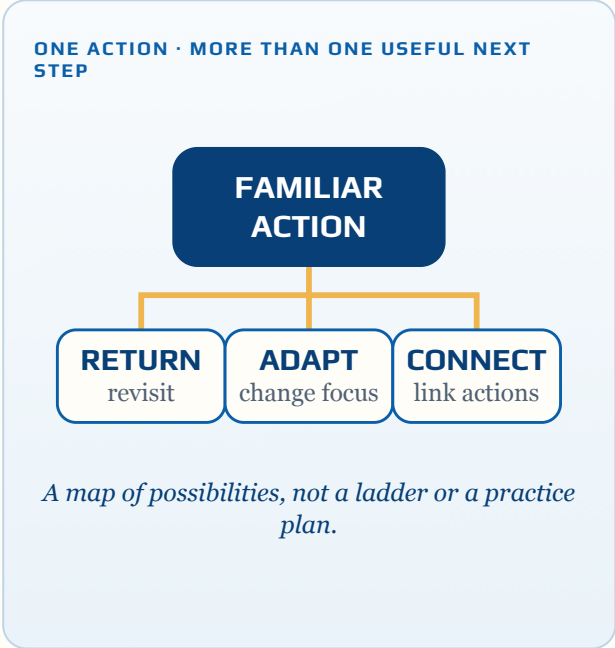
How Skills Connect

Why an “easier” task may be part of learning something new

A child leaves a London after-school class and says, “We did the easier balance again.” Her parent hears *easier* and wonders whether the child has stopped progressing. But the coach may have been working on a different question: how confidently the gymnast can organise the movement today, or how it fits beside another action.

The same familiar balance can be a starting point, a useful return or one part of something new. This chapter is about the words that describe those connections. It is not a plan for teaching skills.

British Gymnastics describes its Rise programme as a progressive recreational journey in which children build foundation skills at their own pace^[1]. Its coaching resources also describe adapting an activity to make it simpler, more challenging or more creative for the gymnast and the setting^[2].



**FROM LAST
ISSUE**

Issue 3 distinguished *shapes* from *skills*. Issue 4 translated the coach’s cues. Now we ask how familiar actions can be revisited, varied and linked.

A Map, Not One Ladder

A gymnast might spend time making one action more secure, meet a related version, or later link actions learned before. The route depends on the gymnast, the activity and the coach’s judgement. This is a map of words, not a universal order of moves.

THE KEY WORDS

Foundation Skill

A familiar movement or ability on which later learning can draw. *Foundation* does not mean “only for beginners.” A gymnast may return to one when the task or context changes.

Progression

A planned development of a task. It may mean a new challenge, a clearer connection or greater consistency—not simply a more spectacular skill^[1,2].

THE WORDS IN CONTEXT

A Change Is Not a Demotion

Regression

A coach may use this word for a less demanding version of a task. It describes a change in the *task*, not a judgement on the gymnast. “Earlier version” or “adapted version” often says the same thing more kindly. That is KGM’s family translation, not a rule for every coach.

Variation

A related version that changes the task’s focus. It is not necessarily easier or harder. A coach may use a variation to explore a different feature or suit the space and equipment available^[2].

Combination / Sequence

Separate learned actions brought into one piece of movement. Linking can add demands of timing, direction, rhythm or attention even when the parts are familiar. USA Gymnastics describes a sequence as two or more positions or skills performed together^[4].

Competition rules may give “connection” or “combination” a more precise meaning. Here we mean the words a family might hear in an ordinary class.

WHAT FAMILIES OFTEN MISUNDERSTAND

“If the coach makes the task easier, my child is going backwards.” Sometimes the coach is making one demand more manageable so another part can be understood. Sometimes the child needs longer with a familiar version. Ask what the present aim is rather than inferring ability from one exercise.

When Skills Are Linked

A *skill* is a complete action. A *combination* connects separate learned actions. A linked piece is more than a list of parts: the transition between them can become a new demand.

That does not make every component “harder,” and it does not place children on one fixed ladder. The useful family question is, “What is the connection asking the gymnast to notice?”

CONCEPT · NOT A DRILL

Action A + Action B

LINKED PIECE

Meaning changes when actions are connected.

Three Names You May Hear

A *round-off* is a named turning floor skill. A *handspring* is a named acrobatic skill involving hand support and flight. A *somersault*, also called a *salto*, is a whole-body rotation^[4]. They are distinct actions, not three compulsory rungs on a ladder. Their development and any linking belong to qualified coaches in suitable facilities. World Gymnastics’ performance-focused Age Group Programme emphasises gradual, safe progressions, but is not a universal syllabus for recreational children^[3].

SAFETY NOTICE

Gymnastics skills should not be practised unsupervised. Many skills require qualified coaching, appropriate equipment, and a safe training environment. If you are unsure, focus on fundamentals and seek guidance from a qualified coach.

AFTER THE LESSON

Ask What the Task Is For

A London parent may have only a few seconds with the coach at pickup. “She said the balance was easier today. What were you helping her learn?” is more useful than “When will she move on?” The coach may explain that the child was exploring a link, rebuilding confidence or practising a familiar action in a changed setting. These are possible purposes, not claims about any particular child.

The child can join the conversation too: “What felt different today?” Their answer may contain a detail the adults missed. Not every lesson needs to become a progress report.

ASK THE COACH

“What were you helping him/her learn today?”

ASK THE CHILD

“What felt different today?”

Gymnastics Translation Box

Word heard in the gym	Useful family translation
Foundation skill	Something the gymnast can build on and return to.
Progression	A planned change in what the task asks.
Regression	A less demanding version of the task—not a demotion.
Variation	A related version with a different focus.
Combination / sequence	Separate actions connected in one piece of movement.
Round-off	A named turning floor skill—not a home-practice instruction.
Handspring	A named acrobatic skill using hand support and flight.
Somersault / salto	A named whole-body rotation.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Gymnastics learning does not have to be a single climb from “easy” to “hard.” Ask what a task is for, how it has changed and what the child experiences. The coach remains responsible for technical and safety decisions.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next time: the names of the apparatus and what makes their purposes different.

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Understanding the Sport

Questions We're Asked

Moving Groups and Starting a New Term

Six calm answers about change, challenge, friendship and communication

A new term can change several things at once. A child may meet a different coach, enter through another door, train beside unfamiliar gymnasts or hear that a friend is staying in the previous group.

In a London family's week, that transition may sit beside a new school timetable, a longer journey or a changed collection arrangement. The group name alone cannot tell a family whether the move is right.

British Gymnastics' club guidance says gymnasts should have a voice and that their opinions should be listened to and valued in decisions that affect them^[1]. A multi-sport qualitative study similarly identified enjoyment, skill development, belonging and open communication as connected parts of a quality youth-sport experience^[2].

- 01 Why has my child moved to a different group?
- 02 What if their friend stays in another class?
- 03 Should groups be organised by age, experience or both?
- 04 What if the new class suddenly feels harder?
- 05 How long can settling into a new routine take?
- 06 When should I speak to the coach?

CHAPTER PRINCIPLE

A group label is not a verdict on a child. Ask what the move is intended to support, listen to what the child is experiencing and agree how the decision will be reviewed.

What This Chapter Owns

The transition itself: group fit, friendship, challenge, settling and communication.

What It Does Not Do

It does not supply a universal placement formula, decide one child's group or turn one difficult lesson into a verdict.

01

QWA-05-01 · GROUP CHANGE

Why has my child moved to a different group?

SHORT ANSWER

A move may reflect age, experience, the present focus of the class, timetable changes, available places or several factors together. Do not assume “promotion” or “demotion”. Ask what changed, what the new group is intended to offer and when the placement will be reviewed.

Why the label is not enough

Group organisation is partly educational and partly practical. A provider may be balancing the range of tasks, the number of gymnasts, coaching roles, apparatus use and the timetable available. Another provider may use different names or thresholds.

The stronger question is not, “Is this group higher or lower?” It is, “Why is this group being proposed for this child now?” A clear answer should explain the intended learning environment without ranking the child against friends.

British Gymnastics’ programme guidance places gymnasts at the centre of decisions that affect them^[1]. That does not mean a child makes the staffing or placement decision alone. It means the adults should hear the child’s experience and explain the purpose.

Do not translate the move as

“My child has gone up” or “My child has gone down” unless the provider has actually explained the change in those terms. A new label is information about the programme—not a measure of the child’s worth.

A move can reflect

Term reset

A timetable or class structure has changed.

Different focus

The new class is organised around another present purpose.

Group fit

The environment may better match current experience or support needs.

Practical structure

Space, staffing, apparatus and available places may matter.

These are possibilities, not a list of reasons that applies to every provider. Ask for the actual explanation.

Ask the programme

- What has changed?
- What is the intended benefit of this group for my child?
- What will be different in the session?
- Is the placement fixed, or will it be reviewed after the child has experienced it?

PARENT TAKEAWAY Ask for the purpose of the move, not a ranking of the group.

02

QWA-05-02 · FRIENDSHIP AND BELONGING

What if their friend stays in another class?

SHORT ANSWER

Take the friendship seriously without making it the only placement test. A familiar friend can support confidence and enjoyment, while a new group can also become a place for new relationships. Help the child name what they are losing and what would make the new room feel more welcoming.

Why “my friend is there” matters

Research with 113 children aged 10–11 in Bristol found that friends supported the start and continuation of physical activity, and that taking part with friends was important to enjoyment^[4].

This was not a gymnastics placement study, and it does not show that friends must always remain in the same class. It does show why the sentence can carry real meaning for a child.

TRUTH ONE

The child may be genuinely sad or worried about the separation.

TRUTH TWO

The proposed group may still be educationally appropriate.

Avoid dismissing the feeling with “You will make new friends.” Begin by asking what the friend helped with. Was it walking into the building, knowing where to stand, having someone to talk to or feeling less visible?

Keep one bridge, build another

- If practical, let the children say hello before or after their separate sessions.
- Keep an existing friendship outside the class rather than treating the move as an ending.
- Ask whether the new-group routine and names can be explained clearly.
- Help the child identify one person or adult they can approach.
- Ask afterwards: “When did you feel most included today?”

Notice the pattern

Quietness on an unfamiliar first day is not the same as persistent isolation. Look for whether the child begins to recognise people, join activities and recover after uncertainty.

If they repeatedly describe exclusion, humiliation or feeling unsafe, raise it promptly.

A useful child question

“What did your friend help you feel or know in the old class?” The answer may reveal the bridge the new environment needs.

PARENT TAKEAWAY A friend is not “just a friend”; the relationship may be part of how the child feels able to participate.

03

QWA-05-03 · HOW GROUPS ARE ORGANISED

Should groups be organised by age, experience or both?

SHORT ANSWER

Usually more than one factor matters. Age can help organise a programme, but children of the same age can differ in experience, confidence, communication and support needs. Experience matters too, but it should not be reduced to the hardest skill a child can perform.

Four factors a programme may consider

Age and stage

Useful for broad organisation, communication and peer context. Age alone does not describe a child's present gymnastics experience.

Experience and understanding

What the child has encountered, how independently they can follow the session and what they currently understand—not merely a list of skills.

Confidence and individual needs

How the child enters, communicates, engages and responds to support. Relevant adjustments or support needs belong in the conversation.

Programme structure

Timetable, staffing, space, equipment and the intended focus of each class. These constraints are real, but should still be explained respectfully.

No universal formula

There is no age-and-skill equation that KGM can apply to every gymnastics provider. Children of the same age do not arrive with identical histories; children who can perform similar actions do not necessarily need the same explanations or support.

A good explanation makes the factors visible and shows how the child's experience will be reviewed.

What the evidence can say

Sport England says positive early experiences that feel fun and build confidence can support a desire to remain active^[3]. Brown and colleagues found enjoyment, progress, belonging and communication were interrelated themes in accounts of quality youth sport^[2].

Neither source supplies a gymnastics grouping formula. Together they support looking beyond age or skill in isolation.

A useful family question

“Which factors led to this placement, and what would tell us that the group is working well for my child?”

PARENT TAKEAWAY Ask how age, experience, needs and the class environment are being considered together.

04

QWA-05-04 · CHALLENGE AND GROUP FIT

What if the new class suddenly feels harder?

SHORT ANSWER

Harder does not automatically mean better or wrong. A useful challenge still leaves the child with enough explanation, support and opportunity to participate. If the child is repeatedly lost, excluded or overwhelmed, ask what is being adapted and how the fit is being reviewed.

What may have changed

A new group can feel harder for reasons that are not visible in a skill list. The room may move faster. Instructions may use unfamiliar words. The child may no longer know where to stand, when to begin or who to ask. Even familiar actions can feel different inside a new routine.

Brown and colleagues’ qualitative study identified challenge and mastery alongside belonging, engagement, meaning and autonomy in its refined quality-sport framework^[2].

That does not create a test for one class. It does remind us that challenge works inside an experience; it should not erase belonging or understanding.

Not a difficulty contest

Moving into a class that looks harder is not automatically progress. Remaining where the child can participate and develop is not automatically stagnation.

Useful challenge may look like

- The task is understandable, even if it takes time.
- The coach notices uncertainty and offers a way in.
- The child can name something learned or attempted.
- Confidence fluctuates but begins to recover.
- There is an achievable part of the session.

A poor fit may be emerging when

- The child repeatedly cannot understand how to join in.
- Uncertainty is ignored or treated as misbehaviour.
- The child is persistently isolated or frightened.
- Agreed support is not being used.
- The pattern worsens rather than eases.

These observations are prompts for a conversation, not a diagnosis or a judgement from one lesson.

Ask the coach

“What is new in this group, what support are you using, and what change would you expect us to notice if the placement is working?”

PARENT TAKEAWAY Judge the quality of the challenge, not simply how difficult the class appears.

05

QWA-05-05 · SETTLING INTO THE ROUTINE

How long can settling into a new routine take?

SHORT ANSWER

There is no universal deadline. Look for direction rather than a countdown: is the child gradually learning the routine, recognising people, participating more readily and recovering from uncertainty? Do not wait for a settling period if the child reports feeling unsafe or a safeguarding concern arises.

Why KGM does not set a number

One child may settle at the first session. Another may need repeated arrivals before the room feels predictable. The transition may also coincide with school, travel or family-routine changes.

Sport England emphasises safe, positive and trusted environments and experiences that support enjoyment and confidence^[3]. NSPCC guidance asks parents to listen to the child, talk openly about feelings and support needs, and raise worries^[5].

Family interpretation

One difficult session can be useful information without deciding the whole placement. A repeated pattern deserves review.

A pattern-based review

Before

Can the child explain where they are going and what happens first? Is reluctance easing or increasing?

Arrival

Do they know where to wait, who is responsible and how to ask for help?

After

Can they describe one moment of participation, connection or understanding?

Across sessions

Is there movement towards familiarity and belonging, even if progress is uneven?

Do not place these on a waiting clock

- a child says they feel unsafe;
- harmful or humiliating behaviour is reported;
- distress is escalating sharply;
- a relevant need is repeatedly ignored;
- there is a safeguarding concern.

PARENT TAKEAWAY Give ordinary unfamiliarity room to change; give safety and welfare concerns a prompt response.

06

QWA-05-06 · COACH-FAMILY COMMUNICATION

When should I speak to the coach?

SHORT ANSWER

Speak early enough that a small question does not become a long guess. Use the programme’s ordinary communication route for clarification and individual updates. Use its welfare or safeguarding route promptly when the concern is about safety or harmful behaviour.

Not every conversation is a complaint

A parent may simply need the reason for the move, while the coach may need information about how the child experiences the transition outside the gym.

Open communication was one of the four themes in Brown and colleagues’ quality youth-sport study^[2]. NSPCC guidance likewise encourages parents to listen, talk openly and raise worries^[5].

Make the conversation useful

- 1 Ask the child privately when they are ready; do not interrogate them at the gym door.
- 2 Avoid interrupting a coach who is supervising children. Use the published contact route or request an appropriate time.
- 3 Describe what has been said or observed instead of labelling the child or coach.
- 4 Ask what happens next and when the arrangement will be reviewed.

Choose the right route

Ordinary question

Ask for the purpose of the group and what will be different.

Individual update

Share what the child is finding difficult and ask what the coach sees.

Persistent problem

Describe the repeated pattern, its effect and support already discussed.

Welfare or safeguarding

Use the provider’s published welfare or safeguarding procedure promptly.

Safeguarding route

NSPCC Sport says organisations should have clear reporting procedures and pass safeguarding concerns on in a timely manner^[6]. If a child is in immediate danger, call 999.

EXAMPLE MESSAGE

“Since moving groups, Sam has said the opening routine is unclear and has been reluctant to enter for three sessions. Could you tell me what you are seeing and what support is available?”

PARENT TAKEAWAY Clear, specific and timely communication helps everyone focus on the child.

MOVING GROUPS · CLOSING GUIDE

A Calm Start to a Changed Group

Prepare what can be known, notice the child's experience, listen without pressure and review the pattern.

01

Prepare
Explain the day, time, entrance, coach or first activity. Do not promise details that have not been confirmed.

02

Notice
Look beyond whether the class appears “hard”. Notice understanding, participation, connection, support and recovery.

03

Listen
Ask one open question when the child is ready: “What felt familiar, and what still felt new?”

04

Review
If the pattern is not easing, share specific observations and ask what support or review will happen next.

The Family Translation

What families may hear	A calmer, more useful interpretation
New group	Not automatically a promotion or demotion; ask what the move is intended to support.
The class feels harder	Ask whether the challenge remains understandable, supported and participatory.
My friend is elsewhere	A real social change that matters, without deciding the whole placement.
Still settling	Look for the direction of the pattern; there is no universal deadline.
I need to speak to the coach	An ordinary part of partnership when the message is clear, specific and timely.

Evidence boundary
Published evidence supports the importance of enjoyment, development, belonging, communication, positive experiences and listening to children. It does not provide one universal gymnastics grouping formula or settling period. The observation prompts and sample questions here are KGM professional interpretation for families.

Key takeaway
A child does not need to prove that a group change was “good” on the first day. The adults should explain the purpose, make the route into the group understandable, listen to the child and respond when the pattern shows that support or review is needed.

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Understanding the Sport

Gymnastics Myths

More Than the Score

Five familiar beliefs about taking part, winning and pressure—examined calmly

Competition is one possible part of gymnastics. It is not the definition of the sport.

For some children, an event can be exciting: a date to work towards, a chance to perform and a shared experience with teammates. For others, competition may not be offered, may not suit the programme, or may simply not be what they want from gymnastics. Both routes can be legitimate.

World Gymnastics describes Gymnastics for All as an activity for people of different ages and abilities, with participation, performance, fun and friendship extending far beyond high-level competition^[1].

The better family question is therefore not “Is competition good or bad?” It is: “What is this competition for, and what kind of experience is being created for this child?”

THIS CHAPTER'S PROMISE

This chapter separates participation from pressure, and a result from the whole experience.

COMPETITION DESERVES CONTEXT, NOT ASSUMPTIONS

1 “Every gymnast has to compete.”
GYMNASTICS ≠ OBLIGATION

2 “Competitions are only for the best children.”
ENTRY ≠ A VERDICT ON WORTH

3 “If my child competes, it will become too serious.”
COMPETING ≠ LOSING THE FUN

4 “Children who do not win should stop competing.”
RESULT ≠ THE WHOLE LEARNING

5 “Competitions always put children under too much pressure.”
NERVES ≠ AUTOMATIC HARM

1

MYTH 1 · CHOICE AND PARTICIPATION

“Every gymnast has to compete.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Most public images of gymnastics come from championships, medals and televised routines. Clubs may also celebrate their competitive teams prominently. It can therefore look as though competition is the natural destination of every class.

Families may hear children speak about “moving up” and assume that progress eventually requires entry into events.

A WIDER SPORT

Gymnastics includes recreational learning, displays, festivals, Gymnastics for All, adult participation and several competitive disciplines. No single pathway represents everyone.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

A child can learn gymnastics without competing. World Gymnastics explicitly presents the sport as more than high-level competition and describes Gymnastics for All as open across age, ability and experience^[1].

Whether competition is offered—and whether it is optional—depends on the club, programme and event. Families should not assume that every provider uses the same pathway. They can ask what participation involves before agreeing.

Competition may provide a useful focus for some gymnasts. Others may value movement, skills, friendships, confidence, performance or simply a weekly class. Those aims do not become less legitimate because they are not measured by judges.

The child’s view matters. Interest can change with age, experience and family circumstances. Saying “not now” is not the same as saying “never”.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Ask what role competition has in the programme, whether entry is optional and what alternatives exist. A gymnast does not need a score to belong in the sport.

2

MYTH 2 · ENTRY AND SELECTION

“Competitions are only for the best children.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Podiums are designed to separate places. Selection lists can also feel like rankings, especially when families have not been told why an event exists or how entries are decided.

That can produce two harmful translations: “selected” becomes “best”, while “not selected” becomes “not good enough”. Neither conclusion necessarily follows.

ASK ABOUT PURPOSE

A competition designed for experience, participation or an appropriate challenge should not be judged as though it were an elite selection trial.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Competitions differ. Some use qualifying standards or limited places. Others are organised by age, level, experience or an adapted format. The meaning of entry therefore belongs to the rules and purpose of that particular event.

Sport England recommends that parents ask what the competition is for at that age or level, how selection decisions are made and what support is available^[2]. Youth Sport Trust guidance similarly places the young person’s motivation, competence and confidence at the centre of meaningful competition^[3].

A child may be entered because an event matches their current skills or offers useful experience. Another child may not be entered because of timing, eligibility, available places, readiness or the programme they attend. None of these decisions measures the whole child.

Transparent criteria matter. Families should be able to ask how entry works without treating selection as proof of status.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Ask about the event’s purpose, entry criteria and communication. Celebrate an opportunity without turning it into a judgement of who matters most.

3

MYTH 3 · SERIOUSNESS AND ENJOYMENT

“If my child competes, it will become too serious.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Competition brings judges, uniforms, schedules and results. Training may become more structured, and families may face extra travel, fees or weekend commitments.

In London, a short event can still mean a long journey. It is reasonable to ask whether the experience fits the child and the family rather than treating every opportunity as an obligation.

SERIOUS IS NOT ONE SETTING

Structure can support learning. It becomes a concern when the result starts to outweigh the child's wellbeing, voice or enjoyment.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

A competitive environment can be light, occasional and development-focused—or intense and outcome-focused. The word *competition* does not tell families which climate they will encounter.

Research on quality youth-sport experiences identifies fun and enjoyment, skill development and progress, social support and belonging, and open communication as important themes^[4]. A systematic review of 29 studies also concluded that the manner and degree of parental involvement matter; autonomy support, moderate involvement and a task-focused climate were among the more constructive patterns^[5].

These findings come from youth sport broadly, not from one type of recreational gymnastics competition. They still offer a useful test: does the environment leave room for enjoyment, learning, relationships and the child's own reasons for taking part?

Competition can add focus without taking over the whole experience. Adults shape that balance.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Before committing, consider the child's reasons, the event's purpose and the family cost in time, travel and money. Serious preparation should not erase enjoyment.

4

MYTH 4 · RESULTS AND LEARNING

“Children who do not win should stop competing.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

A scoreboard gives a clear order. If winning is treated as the only proof of progress, repeated lower placings can look like evidence that a child does not belong.

Children may also compare medals without considering different levels, routines, judging systems, ages or personal starting points.

WHAT A SCORE CAN DO

A score records a judged performance under particular rules on a particular day. It cannot record the whole gymnast, the whole season or the whole reason for participating.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Winning is a real and meaningful goal in competition. It is not the only possible value of taking part.

Youth Sport Trust principles place learning and values development ahead of the result when designing meaningful competition^[3]. Research with young athletes and adult stakeholders likewise identified enjoyment, progress, belonging and communication as parts of a quality sport experience^[4].

That does not mean every loss is secretly a success. A child can feel disappointed, and adults do not need to rush to turn the moment into a lesson. The useful question is whether the experience still offers something the child values—and whether the environment supports development rather than humiliation.

Continuing should not be automatic either. If the child no longer wants to compete, the pressure is excessive or the arrangement no longer fits family life, stopping or pausing can be responsible. The placing alone should not make that decision.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

After an event, begin with the child's experience: “What did you notice, enjoy or learn?” A placing is information—not a verdict on whether to continue.

5

MYTH 5 · PRESSURE AND SUPPORT

“Competitions always put children under too much pressure.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Pre-event nerves are easy to see. A child may become quiet, restless or worried, and families may conclude that competition itself is harmful.

The opposite myth also exists: that pressure automatically “builds character” and should be endured. That is too simple as well.

NERVES NEED LISTENING

Excitement, uncertainty and distress are not the same. The child’s words and behaviour matter more than an adult’s preferred story about toughness.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Competition can feel stressful. It can also feel exciting, purposeful or socially rewarding. The experience depends partly on expectations, preparation, relationships and how adults respond.

A systematic review found that autonomy-supportive parenting, moderate involvement, positive relationships and a task-focused climate were among the more constructive patterns for young athletes’ motivation^[5]. An older cross-sectional study of 677 Norwegian footballers aged 10–14 linked combined parent-and-coach pressure with less constructive psychosocial outcomes, while supportive coaching climates were associated with better ones^[6].

That study was in football, not gymnastics, and cannot prove cause and effect. It should not be used to label every nervous gymnast as harmed. It does support a careful distinction between support and pressure.

Adults can reduce avoidable pressure by clarifying expectations, listening to the child, praising effort and progress as well as results, and knowing how to raise a welfare concern^[2].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Ask how your child wants to be supported. If distress is persistent, escalating or affecting everyday life, pause, speak with the club and seek appropriately qualified help where needed.

FAMILY LENS

Read the Experience, Not Only the Result

What does a child-centred competition environment look like?

A good event is not created by medals alone. Purpose, choice, preparation, adult behaviour and reflection shape what the child carries away.

01 Purpose Families understand why this event is being offered at this age or level, and what children are expected to gain from it.	02 Choice The child's view is heard. Entry is explained clearly and is not presented as a test of loyalty, bravery or personal worth.	03 Preparation The gymnast knows the format, expectations and practical routine. Adults avoid creating last-minute uncertainty where possible.	04 Climate Coaches and families support effort, progress and respectful behaviour. Safeguarding and welfare routes are visible.	05 Reflection Afterwards, the child has space to feel pleased, disappointed or unsure before adults analyse the score or plan the next event.
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Three useful questions before saying yes

What is this event for? Ask what the purpose is for children at this age or level and how entry decisions are made.	What support is available? Ask about supervision, safeguarding, welfare and what happens if a child finds the experience stressful.	Does it fit this child and family? Consider motivation, readiness, travel, cost, timing and whether the child actually wants to take part.
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THE CENTRAL IDEA

A meaningful competition keeps the young person—not the timetable, trophy or adult ambition—at the centre^[2,3].

CLOSING REFLECTION

Competition Is an Option, Not a Definition

A child can be a gymnast without competing. A competition can also be meaningful without a medal.

The useful middle ground is neither to fear competition nor to treat it as the inevitable destination of every gymnast. It is to understand the event, listen to the child and judge the whole experience.

Winning matters within a competition. So do preparation, courage, skill, belonging, communication and the freedom to decide that a different route may suit the child better.

The scoreboard records a result. It cannot record the whole child or the whole journey.

EDITORIAL BOUNDARY

This chapter provides general educational information, not an assessment of a particular child, club or event. Competition formats and entry routes differ. Families should ask the organiser or club about the purpose, rules, selection, costs, safeguarding and support that apply to the specific event.

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READING THE EVIDENCE

The research cited here is youth-sport evidence, not a direct study of every recreational gymnastics event. The older football study is cross-sectional and does not establish cause and effect. Official guidance and peer-reviewed evidence answer different questions and are presented as such.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Built Over Time



A skill, a body, a question and a pathway do not become complete in a single moment.

At the beginning of this issue, growth appeared as a September experience: a familiar lesson meeting a body, group or understanding that had changed. By the end, the idea has become wider.

Research grows because questions are tested rather than protected. A second doctorate and the scientific discussions in Lausanne show why knowledge needs curiosity, method and restraint. A result can move understanding forward without becoming the final answer.

Bodies grow through change, not according to a perfectly smooth plan. Leg muscles work together; vitamins belong within the whole diet; recovery belongs within the whole child. Careful adults notice patterns and avoid turning temporary difficulty into a permanent label.

Practice grows through connection. A simpler task may prepare something more complex. A move to another group may bring uncertainty as well as opportunity. Progress may be visible in a skill, but it may also appear in understanding, confidence, communication or the ability to continue.

Pathways grow when people build them. The Masters World Cup, London Community Competition Programme and European Championships exist on different scales, yet each depends on rules, organisation and people willing to sustain an opportunity. No competition system arrives complete.

Lifelong gymnastics grows through adaptation. A gymnast may train in a specialist centre, in a park or across both. Setting, volume and goals may change while the relationship with movement remains. Continuity means finding a responsible way to carry something valuable forward.

WE MAY BEGIN TO ASK

01 What is developing even when it is not yet visible?	02 What does the evidence allow us to say, and what remains uncertain?	03 Does this pathway offer challenge without making one result the definition of success?	04 How might practice adapt as the gymnast and their circumstances change?	05 What would help gymnastics remain meaningful across years?
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There is no single route through gymnastics and no single measure of what the sport can mean. A lesson, competition or score records one point in time. The larger story connects earlier learning, present experience and the possibility of continuing.

One lesson can begin a pattern. One question can improve understanding. One pathway can widen participation.

What lasts is built over time.

Knowledge, practice and opportunity grow through continued attention.

ISSUE 5 · END MATTER

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THE PERSON BEHIND THE PUBLICATION

About the Editor

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

Editor · sports scientist · gymnastics coach · active Masters gymnast



COACH · SCIENTIST · GYMNAST

Dr Stefan Kolimechkov is a London-based sports scientist, gymnastics coach, researcher and active Masters gymnast. He completed his first PhD in Physical Education in 2018 and is currently undertaking a second doctorate in Human Sciences at the University of Greenwich. His work brings together more than two decades in gymnastics with scientific research into physical fitness, human movement and health.

He founded Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy and is the Editor of Kensington Gymnastics Magazine. Across these roles, his work connects the realities of the gym with scientific research and the questions families encounter around movement, development and lifelong participation.

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As Editor, Stefan works across the gym, the laboratory and scientific literature — translating research into clear, responsible explanations for families while continuing to contribute to research himself.

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