



HELPFUL TIPS: Gymnastics Judging

As we approach the upcoming meet this will be the first time that some of your gymnasts will be judged by USAG sanctioned judges while others have experienced USAG judges many times. Judging can be confusing so here are some things to keep in mind:

- 1) You are not a judge. Enjoy watching the competition, encourage, and cheer on your child and other gymnasts. **HAVE FUN!**
- 2) These are sanctioned judges coming from another city. They know none of our girls so they have no preconceived notion about how they will perform, or who should or should not perform better than the other. They judge what they see that day and that day only!
- 3) This is a subjective sport. While the USAG has extremely strict guidelines as to what the routines should look like (as picky as where the head is looking and how the hand is positioned), it is the human eye that is viewing the performance. Even with strict standards there may be some difference in interpretation. The eye may also fail them at times. (i.e. 2 judges once called a coach over to inform her that one of our gymnasts did not do a required skill — that one skill meant a 1.8 deduction — HUGE in gymnastics — That can easily make a difference between first and last place. After the meet, a video was shown to the judges which verified that indeed the skill was done. They apologized for their error however, it did not matter. In gymnastics there are no instant replays or video analyzing!) (The point should also be made that it was rare for the judges to speak with the coaches. Typically there is no feedback and discussion is not allowed without a formal inquiry. Formal inquiries are rare, need good cause, and must be done immediately.)
- 4) While we think that our children look wonderful — perhaps even better than the next person, most of us do not know the routines. Compulsory level 4-6 routines have no room for deviation — no adding an extra arm swing here or turn of the head there — as a spectator you would not notice these things, but a judge does. Beyond the routines themselves, most of us simply do not know what the judges are looking for. Below are some examples of things that you may not realize or notice that can make a lot of difference in the way a routine is judged:

On **BARS**, for example, you see 2 gymnasts both do nice routines — one falls, one doesn't. The one that falls may get a higher score. How can that possibly be????? Let's look at it further. A fall is a .5 deduction. It seems like a big mistake to a spectator, but many little mistakes can easily add up to bring a person's score down much further than .5. Errors such as the following, are all deductions:

- each pause on the bar (the bar routine is supposed to flow from one move to another with no pauses)
- insufficient casts or swings on the bar (the angle of the body in the air on a swing and cast is judged and if not to the standard required, will be a deduction.
- extra swings — Without knowing the routine, you would never notice an extra swing, but any extra movements are a deduction.



HELPFUL TIPS: Gymnastics Judging

- if legs are not together when they are supposed to be, knees are bent, or toes are not pointed, there are deductions . . . each time it happens!
- if a coach touches a gymnast when spotting, that is counted as a fall — .5 deduction
- these are just a few things . . . there are many more

Lets look at **BEAM** — as always — a fall is a .5 deduction but a deep knee bend or a big wobble can count as just as big of a deduction. Every single little wobble is also a deduction. Many little wobbles can add up quickly. 2 routines may look equally good, but if one is done on high toe and the other with flat feet, the high toe is desired and will get a higher score. The rhythm of the routine is considered. The presentation is considered. Does your gymnasts have her head held high with chin up or is it down? Little things like this can make a difference in how a routine is scored.

VAULT — This is perhaps the hardest for an untrained eye to judge because it is so fast. Two gymnasts go over the vault table. Both have beautiful straight legs, knees together, both stick the landing — where can the differences be? How hard did the gymnasts run? How much and how high was the pre-flight (air between hitting spring board and vault table)? How much push off did the gymnast get from vault table? How much post-flight did the gymnasts get (distance and height after hands left the vault table)? What was the position of the body in the air? Was it straight or piked? So many things to consider in just an instant!

FLOOR — Perhaps the most fun to watch and perhaps the event that would be easiest to miss if there is a deviation from the routine. Once again — every little wobble or stumble is a deduction. If the hand hits the floor or there is a deep knee bend when doing a skill that is not supposed to be there, it will count the same as a fall. How much height is achieved in the tumbling passes? When making turns, is the full rotation required achieved with ease? Are elements added to the routine? It may seem like a great thing to add an extra back handspring, but that is a big deduction in compulsory gymnastics. A gymnast must wait until she is an Optional gymnast (level 7-10) before she is allowed freedom in the routine. Even then there are guidelines!

I hope you get the idea. I share this not to discourage you, but encourage you in hopes that you will understand that there is more to it than what meets the eye! Instead of comparing your gymnast to the next, just cheer her on and encourage her to try to do better each and every time she competes and to have doing it!

Good luck to all the gymnasts and to all the parents who may be nervous for their children. Have FUN!!!!