

Visa Championships

Wednesday through Saturday; American Airlines Center, Dallas Convention Center

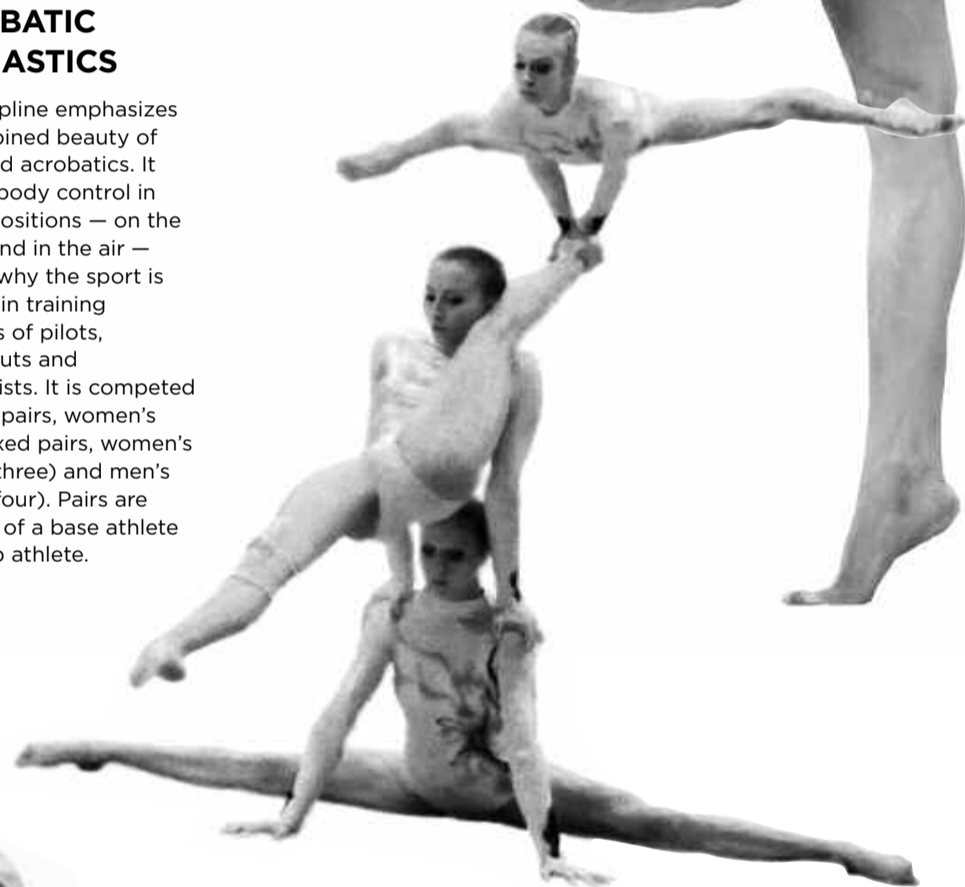
Inside Spin

Here's what to watch in the five disciplines on display this week

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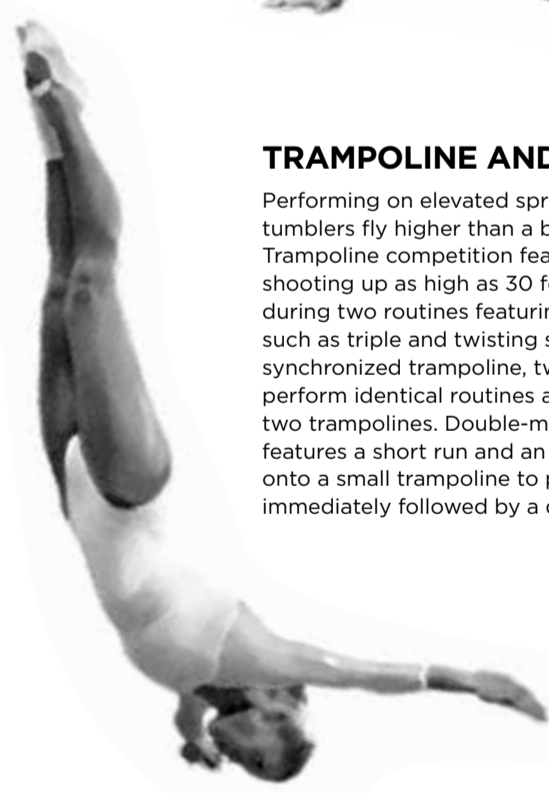
ACROBATIC GYMNASTICS

The discipline emphasizes the combined beauty of dance and acrobatics. It requires body control in various positions — on the ground and in the air — which is why the sport is included in training programs of pilots, cosmonauts and parachutists. It is competed as men's pairs, women's pairs, mixed pairs, women's groups (three) and men's groups (four). Pairs are made up of a base athlete and a top athlete.



TRAMPOLINE AND TUMBLING

Performing on elevated spring runways, power tumblers fly higher than a basketball goal. Trampoline competition features athletes shooting up as high as 30 feet in the air during two routines featuring 10 skills each, such as triple and twisting somersaults. In synchronized trampoline, two athletes perform identical routines at the same time on two trampolines. Double-mini trampoline features a short run and an athlete jumping onto a small trampoline to perform a trick immediately followed by a dismount.

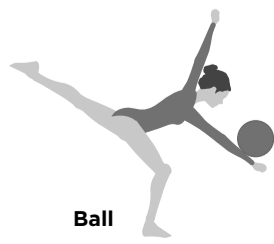


RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS

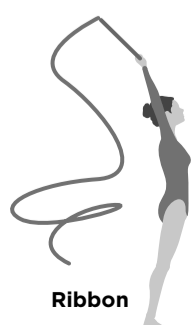
Agile athletes perform body movements and dance combined with handling a rope, hoop, ball, ribbon or clubs set to music. In the group event, five athletes perform together as a unit. Ribbon routines, for example, feature throws and catches and figure-eight movements. The ribbon remains constantly in motion. With the rope, gymnasts leap and jump through an open or folded rope, held by both hands. Three panels of judges score each routine, marking technical and artistic value and execution.



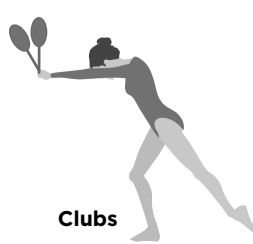
Rope



Ball



Ribbon



Clubs



Ring

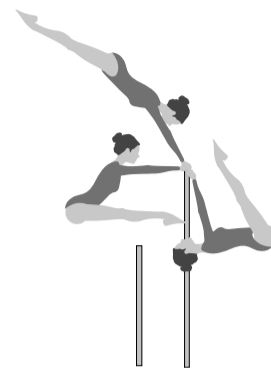


WOMEN'S ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

The discipline of Nastia Liukin, Carly Patterson and Mary Lou Retton, features competition on the uneven bars, floor exercise, balance beam and vault. The open-ended scoring system no longer features a perfect 10. Gymnasts are judged by the A score (technical difficulty of the routine) and B score (execution and artistry). The Code of Points has changed since last summer's Olympics, putting more emphasis on dance and artistry.

Uneven bars

The routine must move from the low bar to the horizontal bar, incorporating many grip changes, releases and regrabs, flight elements, changes of direction and circle swings through the handstand position.



Beam

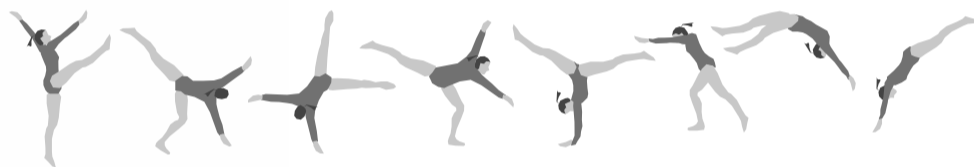
During the 90-second routine, the gymnast must include a 360-degree turn, a leap with a 180-degree leg split and an acrobatic sequence with at least two smooth movements that require the gymnast to leave the beam and return to it while maintaining balance.

A **stepover somersault** is a common element in a routine.



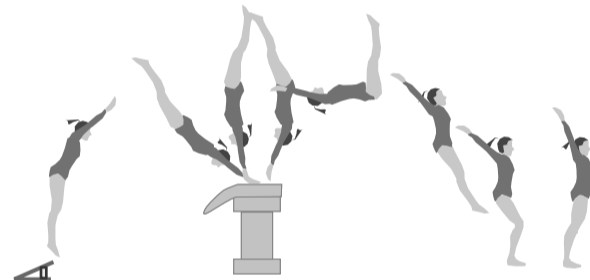
Floor routine

The gymnast must use dance and tumbling elements on a 40-by-40-foot mat to create high points in the exercise. The tumbling elements should flow freely into each other while the leaps cover impressive distances. Women's routines are set to music.



Vault

Gymnasts must run up to a springboard, launch themselves onto the vault table, perform mid-air movements and land squarely on both feet.



Gymnasts to watch:

Nastia Liukin: Olympic all-around champion competing only on balance beam and uneven bars as she returns to competition shape

Bridget Sloan: 2008 Olympic could be the favorite for the all-around

Rebecca Bross: Liukin's WOGA teammate, the 2007 junior national champ could star in her first senior national

Olivia Courtney: Floridian won the recent CoverGirl Classic

Other 2008 Olympians competing include: Samantha Peszek, Chellsie Memmel and alternates Ivana Hong, who trains at WOGA, and Jana Bieger.

MEN'S ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

Men's gymnastics features six apparatuses to the women's four: parallel bars, floor exercise, pommel horse, still rings, vault and high bar. Featuring muscle-popping displays of strength, gymnasts perform such skills as the Iron Cross on the still rings, in which the athlete extends his arms out from both sides while suspended in mid-air. On the high bar, gymnasts soar during release moves. As with women's artistic gymnastics, scoring is based on difficulty and execution.

Gymnasts to watch:

Jonathan Horton: Oklahoma grad won individual silver on the high bar in Beijing

David Sender: 2008 U.S. champion didn't make the Olympics after suffering an injury at the U.S. trials

Steve Legendre: Flower Mound's own won the all-around for Oklahoma at the NCAA Championships

Other 2008 Olympians competing: Alexander "Sasha" Artemev and Joey Hagerty