

Dear Team Parents,

With the first meets of the year rapidly approaching, we are very excited. The teams are also very excited and many are nervous. Tina, the coaches, & I are asked oodles of questions from new Team parents. Some ask other parents and are often given erroneous information (The Blind leading the Blind). I thought I would address them all in my newest book entitled "COMPETITIVE GYMNASTICS for DUMMIES" or "GYMNASTICS 101 CLIFF NOTES" (Have not decided on the title yet. It's written in a kind of "What to Expect / Do" format. These are in no particular order, just in the order we thought of them. Take your laptop into the bathroom and sit down for a good read. Some is Funny, some Educational, but ALL of this is Important, and should help you a little as you enter this Crazy Sport!

1. **DIRECTIONS:** Always allow ample time to arrive at a meet. When considering travel time, allow time for delays due to traffic or construction. Large Meets like the "Star's & Stripes" are hosted in Arenas, Sports Complexes, or College/ High School Gyms... and are relatively easy to find. However most medium to small meets are held at the host gymnastics club. As a result, many (like EGC) are a little off the beaten path, and harder to find. Technology has changed that has made things a lot easier now-a-days. GPS systems are relatively inexpensive, or standard on many vehicles. Also, there are many websites that print out the directions for you. At any rate, make sure you have good directions prior to leaving and enough time to get there safely. Some people like to always cut things close. As a result, as time runs short, the parent starts getting nervous and flustered and this rubs typically runs off on the child. When late, parents are often Speeding, swearing, swerving, to get there, and the typical playing of the child in the back seat becomes an irritant and often gets the brunt of the parents frustration. // It is also important to note that ALWAYS, a Club (like ours) hosts a meet. That does NOT ALWAYS mean that the Meet is hosted at the Club. As is the case for our Stars & Stripes Invitational. Every Year - At least 5 Parents and Gymnasts from other gyms - type in the location in their GPS for our Gym and NOT the Bayfront Convention Center. As a result, they sit scratching their heads outside our gym wondering where all the people are. Next, they call the gym, and it goes to voice mail in that we (all of our staff) are down the Convention Center. So, make sure you type in the correct location!
2. **FOOD:** A gymnast should have a moderate sized meal about an hour or more prior to coming to the competition. You want to avoid heavy foods with lots of fats. Heavy foods and overeating create lethargic gymnasts. Also, gymnasts get nervous, and nausea is common, and too much leads to bigger problems. A high carb meal is the best for keeping their energy up during a meet. Gymnasts are NOT permitted to eat during the Competition! A Competition usually lasts 4 to 5 hours. Do NOT send Food or Snacks with them in their bags. The gymnasts are permitted bottled water only. Fruit juices, sodas, power drinks— leak and stain the guest gym equipment and their leos. Typically for the Parents & Siblings, most gyms provide a concession stand during the meet. Here you typically can get anything from Coffee, Hot Dogs... to Pulled Pork. Again, think of your gymnast as a Pro Football Player. When watching a game, we do not see the Quarterback on the sidelines eating Cookies!
3. **PACK YOU STUFF:** It is a good idea for your child to put on and everything out the night before you leave for the meet. Then one piece at a time, pack that stuff. On numerous occasions people lose outfits somewhere between the gym, home, and meet. The gymnast should pack their Competitive Leo / Leotard, a Warm-up Leo, Grips, Wristbands, Warm-ups for Level 5's & up (Whatever is required for your Level in that Boys / Girls clothing requirements and level clothing varies). Make sure the gymnast has their Grips and wristbands. Although at some meets they may sell grips, they will not be broken in and virtually useless. I have been to many meets where the parents spent all this money on gymnastics lessons, parents club, hotel, gas... only to have their kid blow their bar routine due to the fact they left their grips at the gym. Often, the coaches leave for the meet, and we are not around to open up to get your grips from their locker.
4. **MARK YOUR STUFF:** a) Depending on their level, they often tote a lot of stuff (leggings, Competitive Leo, Warm-up Leo, grips, warm-ups, back-packs...) Typically this stuff is all EGC Logo stuff or Team Lightning Competitive wear, and thus, there are 10 - 15 - 20 team members on the floor with identical stuff. B) They are kids. They take stuff off and drop it where they be. They later don't remember where that place 'be', and more often totally forget leaving it in the first place. At the end of our Stars & Stripes Meet, we end up with a huge box of outfits, leos, gym bags, grips.... We try to return what we find, but often we have no idea. Stitch in their name, write their name on the label... so if found, it can be returned. C) Also common is that they lose their Pants, Jackets... and pick up someone else's on the team by accident. Again, a name will help us sort it out! WE - are NOT responsible for lost or stolen stuff. We recommend that other than competitive gear, they don't bring other junk out with them... (stuffed good luck bears / previously won medals and awards / flowers / cell phones & electronics...)
5. **NERVES / SLEEPING:** Obviously getting a good nights sleep is important. However you can expect that most kids nerves kick in as they approach the meet, but especially the night before. Also, Hotel meets also

interfere with sleep in the “different environment”. My recommendation is try not to make too many weird adjustments to their schedule or sleep pattern. It also is good to do something distracting to take their mind off the nervousness that is typically felt. However, most kids—especially newer athletes WILL NOT sleep well the night before a meet. The only consolation is that the kids on the other teams feel this nervousness too. Also, you most likely may have bouts with nausea and diarrhea pre-meet. I have kids on the upper Optional Levels who after 100’s of competitions still get the runs right before a meet. Try not to confuse nerves with illness. ----- On more than one occasion we have a parent call and notify us their child is sick. “She was up all night in the hotel, and had diarrhea! So we aren’t bringing her!” Thus, they drove, spent the money for the Hotel, and cancelled because the signs of nervousness mimic the signs of true illness. Obviously, we don’t want truly ‘ill’ children spreading their sickness at the meet. However, more often than not, it’s just the symptom of nerves, and often immediately after getting into the groove of the meet, those symptoms rapidly dissolve.

6. **DRESS CODE:** If you have never saw the gymnastics movie “Stick It”, you should get the movie. It is a pretty good movie, and very little is actually exaggerated. Numerous people seeing the movie (even from other gyms) said I remind them exactly of the Head Coach in the movie. One of the big incidents in the movie is that a ‘mean judge’ (old score to settle with the coach) penalizes his gymnast for her bra strap sticking out of her leotard. This is a TRUE deduction. Our sport is all about image, and gymnasts are expected to play the part. Earrings—Gymnasts are permitted 1 set of stud earrings (1 in each ear). Dangling earrings are deducted in that they are considered dangerous and distracting. Nail Polish is NOT PERMITTED. This again is considered distracting. NO JEWELRY of any kind is permitted—Necklaces, Rings, Toe Rings.... Hair is to be neat. Long Hair is to be tied back or braided. Extremely long hair and extensions is highly frowned upon if not tied up. It is considered dangerous. Gymnasts are not permitted to wear Hair Beads. I’m not a fan of Bows (they are marginally legal), but often fly off when gymnasts are tumbling creating both a distraction and a hazard. Gymnasts are to tie hair with rubber bands or a team color Scrunchie. There is a deduction for Bras & Undies sticking out of the leotard. Our advice is to take your gymnast to a “Victoria’s Secret” type store and buy Undies the same color as their leo bottom. String Bikini type Undies are best for tucking in high on the hips. They also sell Undies and Bras with ‘Invisible’ (clear) straps. This helps hide them if they do come out. The bra should fit in the leo. Many like to wear ‘sports bras’ to practice that often don’t hide well within their leo. At a meet it matters, so make sure the style Bra you get them fits within the confines of the leo. Again, color match them with the leo. If they are just wearing a bra to be a “Big Girl”, yet don’t need one yet, don’t wear it.
7. **PARENT DRESS CODE:** Team Parents should try to dress in the team colors (Black & Red). There is no required wear, however many parents buy a T-Shirt or Sweat Shirt sporting the logo of the gym they are with. We will be offering these on our Christmas Brochure very soon. We will have T-Shirts, Sweat shirts, and Polo’s available in Adult Sizes. Parents also like to wear buttons with their gymnast on their shirt or coat. Other than that, you probably want to bring an extra shirt, coat, or sweatshirt. Gyms often keep the temperature comfortable for the gymnasts. This is fine if you are dancing and tumbling, however if you are just sitting, it occasionally can get cold. Also, a group of Wild Boys Team Parents years ago started a tradition of wearing Black Bra’s & Panties to Competitions. They swore this folklore was good luck, and many have been doing it for years. Do with that info what you want.
8. **TEAM SPIRIT / CHEERING—** It is nice to have our team parents all sit together. Sometimes this is impossible. Some parents like to move around to get closest to the event their child is competing on. However it is nice to stay together as a cheering section. Gymnastics Cheering is somewhere between a Football Game and a Golf Tourney. Whistling, Screaming, Taunting the Judges is considered too much and over the top. However, you are not required to sit on your hands either. Feel free to cheer and applaud not only for your child, but the other kids on our team. It also is considered Polite (and we require this) to stay until all of the awards have been given out. Sometimes at a meet, they give awards age group by age group. Thus, once people get their awards, they tend to shuffle out ASAP. This is not polite in that I have seen many meets where the vast majority of the crowd is gone, and the last few kids have nobody cheering for them. It is considered poor sportsmanship. Awards ceremonies typically last an hour after a meet and start soon after the last child competes. Another question that was asked was are the gymnasts required to stay for additional session in which members of their team or other Team Lightning levels are competing. This is nice, but not by any means required. Sometimes due to age groups athletes on the same level are split into 2 sessions. It is nice to have their teammates in the stands cheering for them (especially if it is a team meet). However, often staying for additional sessions would require staying in a hotel or incurring additional costs, thus we don’t feel it is necessary. What however is common, and our Optional Team does this all the time is the Athletes get adopted by the parents in the next session. Thus, they arrange with one of their team mates to ride home with them and stay and watch the meet. Sometimes they stay with the family at the hotel and come the next day. Thus, the team stays together and the parents are free to go. We stay out of the arrangement, but ‘trust me’, these kids will soon become your extended family, and everyone takes turns hosting team sleepovers and

- parties... and you soon will have more children at your house than you prefer. One point to mention though is if they stay for the next session, they are not permitted on the competitive floor. Thus, they must stay in the stands. For one, there are too many people on the floor, as well, they are often a distraction to their friends.
9. PHOTOGRAPHY— You will probably want to bring your camera and video camera. However it is a USAG rule that “Flash Photography” is not permitted at a competition. The Flashes supposedly cause temporary blindness, and can result in an injury. Typically the kid you are taking a photo of is most likely your kid, so you don’t want them hurt. This rule is typically announced at each meet, however Judges often go ballistic when they see a flash. I have actually seen them take peoples camera’s until after the meet. Whatever you bring, make sure the flash is turned off. Flash is fine when the meet is over and they are getting awards.
 10. ADMISSIONS / REGISTRATION— When you first arrive at the meet, they typically have 2 tables—one for Admissions, and one for Gymnast Registration. Most gyms charge an admission fee for spectators. This varies from gym to gym, however it typically is \$7.00 / adult at smaller meets hosted in gym clubs, and \$12.00+ at bigger competitions hosted in arenas. Be sure you have some cash because most gyms do not have MAC machines. You also want some spending cash for concessions and often they have 50/50 raffles and Chinese Auctions.... Some of the bigger meets will have vendors selling anything from Leotards, Pictures, T-Shirts, to Back Massagers. Gymnasts should always check in to the Registration Table. At this table they will check in and receive their competitor number (typically written on their hand). Sometimes they are also given a gift or T-Shirt as a memento of the competition. Many times they hand this stuff out at the end.
 11. WARM-UP TIME: A gymnast should be present ‘ready to go’ at least 15 minutes prior to their scheduled start time. Every meet allows a minimum of 20 minutes for General Stretch & Warm-up (typically 1/2 hour). This is a very important time to get the gymnasts body and mind warmed-up and ready to go. After the ‘General Warm-up’, the gymnasts will be directed to warm up on the apparatus. There are different formats depending on the meet. At many smaller meets they will run ‘Traditional Format’ which means the gymnasts will go warm-up their skills on all of the events (Floor, Bars, Vault...) They will then assemble after warming up on all the events and March-in for Introductions. At larger competitions (like Star’s & Stripes) they will run what is called “Non-Traditional Format”. This format means the gymnasts will warm-up one event, and then immediately compete that event. When done, they will move to the next event and warm-up that event. Each gymnast is given an allotted amount of time to warm-up (It varies depending on the level). Compulsory gymnasts are allowed 1 minute per apparatus. Optional gymnasts are allotted 2 minutes per apparatus. There typically is a person timing the warm-ups to ensure each gymnast gets their allotted time. What most coaches will do is “Block” their time on the equipment which means they add up the total amount of time given to all of their gymnasts and share it with-in their team. For example if we have 9 compulsory gymnasts, we will block 9 minutes of time and share them as a team. This is typically better in that the gymnasts don’t have to rush as much to get ready. Sometimes we may be in mixed squads with other teams. In this case it all depends on the situation and the team we are with. Some gyms are fine and we block with them because it favors the athletes on both teams. However some gyms are out for blood, and will do anything to get extra time for their kids and disadvantage your team in which case we take our time independently. What this all means to you is that if it is a “Traditional Format”, you have about an hour to kill before your child actually competes. Go get a coffee and a newspaper and relax. If it is a ‘Non-Traditional’ format, then you have about 10-15 minutes between each event.
 12. OLYMPIC ORDER: At most meets, ALL apparatus (events... Floor / Bars...) start at the same time. The gymnasts (Team) will ‘Randomly’ be assigned a starting event. In the case of some of our large Compulsory Teams -- large teams may be split into 2 or more groups starting on different apparatus. The gymnasts will start - warm-up & compete on their initial apparatus. From there, the gymnasts will rotate in “Olympic Order” which is the standardized international norm. Women Rotate— Vault // Uneven Bars // Balance Beam // Floor Ex. Men’s Olympic Order is— Floor Ex. // Pommel Horse // Still Rings // Vault // Parallel Bars // High Bar. This means if the girls are randomly selected to start on Uneven Bars, then their next event will be Beam. As a coach, I typically hate drawing Beam as my first event. My reasoning is typically most gymnasts are very nervous in the beginning of the meet until they ‘settle in’. Beam is very difficult, and the nerves (shaking & adrenaline rush) make it even more difficult. If the gymnast starts the meet with a fall, it often is hard to get their spirits up for the next 3 events, thus sometimes makes for a very long day for me. As a coach I like to get Vault first in that it is an event that favors the adrenaline rush. It makes them run faster which helps their score. They also get 2 vaults (women only) and pick the better score. You will however learn to hate Balance Beam and for Boys Pommel Horse no matter where they have the draw.
 13. ATHLETE ORDER: Depending on the meet format, your child will either be first up, last up, or somewhere in the middle. How this is decided depends on the type of meet and the coaches discretion. At large meets and always State Meets and higher, the order in which the athletes compete is a random draw. This is to try to ensure there is no favoritism or strategy in play by the coaches. A different gymnast in each squad is predetermined to start first. Rarely does that athlete ever have to be first again at that meet. However at most ‘Regular Season Meets’ our coaches make the draw. There is often a strategy employed by the coaches.

Realize that the judging is 'supposed' to be objective, however we are all human (Judges as well) and often interject 'subjectivity'. Thus the coaches often play this way. Typically I will line my athletes up weakest to strongest on each event. Realize that most often every gymnast has a weak event, and often they are mixed and don't have to start every event. This is for the benefit of both the weakest and strongest. Often early in the meet, the Judges tend to be more conservative with their scores. If they start too high with a 9.5 on the first gymnast, where do they go with the scores if they have 15 gymnasts who are better? Thus, if your best kid goes first, that score often doesn't stand up as the meet goes on. Also, if a really strong gymnast goes up, immediately followed by a weak gymnast, it makes the weaker gymnast look even weaker, thus hurting his/her score. There are many coaching strategies deployed depending on the circumstances. Sometimes I may have a very consistent gymnast go first to establish in the judges mind that we are a solid competitive team. If I put up a gymnast that is very weak and may have 3 falls on beam, the judges may think that we are not a good team or well prepared, and therefore continue judging with that perception making it more difficult for the rest of the team. Sometimes we may start with our most consistent followed by the ascending predictions, with the weakest athlete at the end so as not to hurt the team score. Sometimes we also may sneak a gymnast in the high middle of the group to try to get her qualified for her State Meet. By trying to build the scores higher and higher, we sneak in a weaker athlete who the judge suspects is better than the previous gymnasts, and although the score may dip down, it doesn't go as low as it would otherwise thus allowing them to build a qualifying score. Sometimes, for example with my 3 level 9's... each is stronger at one event, thus I sometimes allow them to pick their order or have a contest to determine order. The moral is, do not take offense by the order in which your child competes... it is almost always in their best interest.

14. **QUALIFYING:** I mention qualifying in the previous paragraph. This refers to the minimum score required for the gymnast to get invited to the "Championship Meets". This is a season goal for every gymnast on our team, and is necessary to advance to our PA Championship Meets. For Men, they change the rules every year, so I can not at this point tell you what they will choose this year. For Girls, it depends on their level, and each has its own specific All Around score required. At the end of this letter I will put a chart for this years Qualifying Score requirements. This qualifying score however can be attained any time during the season at any meet. There was some question as to whether they can qualify at an out of state meet, and in fact they can. For the Higher Level Boys and Women's Optionals, they also try to advance from State Championships to the Regional Championships (7 States). At these Levels, sometimes there is a minimum All Around score they must attain at that Competition. Other times, it is a "Set Number" of athletes who will advance, and you must place in that All Around spot to advance to the next Championship. For example, at Levels 9 & 10 Women's the gymnast must place in the top 6 Athletes in the All Around per age group to qualify to Nationals.
15. **MOBILITY:** Gymnasts are also competing for "Mobility" rights at a Competition. Mobility is an interesting concept, and one perhaps Public Schools and such should look at adopting. At Erie Gymnastics Center, a 'typical student' starts the year as a Beginner (think of this as Grade 1 in school). Most, by the end of the year are ready for our Intermediate Level classes (think of this as Grade 2). "I" as Principal of the school can not possibly look at every child's skill level and pass / fail that gymnast. Thus, my coaches (school teachers) make the determination that that student is ready for the next grade. I give our "teachers" a curriculum (course of study with specific skills) to teach that class. They as teachers must determine that each child is at least 75% proficient at those skills and events to move to the next class. Think of 75% as a "C Grade" in school. The child doesn't have to pass with all "A Grades", just an average of 'passing grades'. ~~ However, when a gymnast enters the USA Gymnastics Competitive Team (typically Level 2, 3 or Xcel Bronze for Women / Level 4 for Men), no longer are the coaches allowed to make that judgement call. ~~ This rule sort of came about because of liability. In the olden days, a coach could just look at a gymnast and pick which level he/she thought he/she could do. Over ambitious coaches might pick a child with relatively weak skills and put that child directly to Level 10 (just to brag). As a result, that child might have to perform difficult and dangerous skills often getting hurt in the process. Too many injuries added up, and thus the Mobility Rules incurred. ~~~ Once a child enters the Competitive Arena at the lower levels mentioned above, it is now up to the gymnast and the judges for the athlete to be ELIGIBLE for the next level. Most typically for Women, they need a 31.00 out of a possible perfect 40.00 All Around score to be ELIGIBLE for the next level. If you think about the 31.00 All Around score, it is approximately a 75% or "C Grade" equivalent. Thus, the gymnast must score that All Around (at any meet) to be permitted to move the next season up to the next level. I mentioned that the Public Schools might learn from this in that as a former teacher, I could make a test extremely hard or extremely easy. For example - What is the Scientific word for plants turning sunlight into energy? A) Photosynthesis B) Truck C) Banana D) Jupiter _____. In this form of Mobility, it removes the teacher / coach from any bias toward his/her students. It also forces the coach / teacher & athlete to meet a minimum standard of quality. ~~ I also mentioned and capitalized the word ELIGIBLE. Because your child meets the 'minimum' standard for mobility does not guarantee that your child will in fact move up. There are many factors to this including - mastery of the next level skills / attendance / maturity / nuances of age

expectations for the next level.... But, it is nice to have the ability to move a gymnast when ready, and this is one of the mandates. The score again is typically 31.00 for Compulsory Gymnasts and 34.00AA for Optional Gymnasts.

16. AGE GROUPS: Typically at a meet you will see a lot of gymnasts. Sometimes like our Star's & Stripes, there may be multiple sessions of athletes at the same level. USA Gymnastics limits the number of athletes competing in a Session or Flight to 96 athletes for compulsory or 64 for Optionals. At most meets these 90 athletes are not directly competing against each other. The athletes are broken into age groups. There is a predetermined Age Group for State Meets and higher, but none for Invitational's which are most of the meets we attend. The Age Groups are determined by the host club. Some Clubs are generous with awards, and break these age groups down pretty far. Other competitions have larger Age Groups. As an example, the upcoming meet may have 60 level 4's registered for the meet. The youngest is 6, and the oldest level 4 is 14 years old. They will break these athletes into 3 groups— (Age 9 and under) (Age 10 & 11) and (Age 12+). Thus each age group is broken into about 20 gymnasts. Let's say your child is 10 yrs old. He/She will compete in the 10 & 11 year old age group against all the other gymnasts who are 10 and 11. This will include gymnasts from other gyms, and most likely some team mates. There will be separate awards for just this Age Group. Thus, there will be a Vault Champion for this age group, and a different one for the other age groups. So, unless you know the other kids on the other teams and how old they are, it is very difficult to tell who is winning prior to awards. However I will emphasize the following point. Gymnastics is NOT like most other sports (Basketball / Baseball / Soccer / Boxing...) In most sports, there are 2 teams or 2 competitors and they go head to head. At the end of the game, there is 1 winner and 1 loser. In gymnastics, your child will be up against 15, 25, 40, even 60 other gymnasts all competing for 1 gold medal. Depending on how you look at it, there can be one winner and 59 losers. That is typically not how we judge the gymnasts. At most meets they award a minimum of 25% awards. That means that if they are in the top 25% of their age group they will get a medal. The term Podium is used to describe the Awards stands at meets. If the gymnast makes the podium, it typically means they placed first, second, or third at the meet. This is always good. However we typically base success on specific goals for our gymnasts. For our newer athletes, just getting out there and doing their routines is cause for celebration regardless of score. It is scary to put on a little leo and get out in front of a large (typically hostile) audience. I say hostile in terms of the only people who want your child to win is the parents of that child and the coach. There are many goals set by the coaches and the athletes... things like perfecting a specific skill, reaching a specific score, qualifying, sticking a beam routine....
17. AGE DETERMINATION: The age group a gymnast is entered in is typically determined by the age the gymnast will be at the culminating meet of the Season. This means Levels 4-7 athletes will compete in the age group they will be as of the PA State Championships for that level. Level 8's will be the age they are the date of the Region VII Championships. Levels 9 & 10 will compete in the age they will be as of Nationals. These dates are posted on the PA website and on our website under Stars & Stripes. It is important to note for levels 4 thru 7 that when competing in other states, your child may be a different age in that each state governs when they host their State Meets. Thus, NY, WV, OH State dates are not the same as ours, so they technically may get moved around at each meet.
18. JUDGES: As much as we try to make the sport Objective, the sport is "Subjective" in nature. I at one point in my career used to Judge, and I can attest it is a very very difficult job. I didn't like it at all. However 'most' of the Men & Women who judge are professionals. To become a Judge, they have to pass a series of tests. I will attest that these tests are very difficult. To give you an idea, every skill in gymnastics has its own name. Each of these skills has a symbol that looks like a Chinese Letter. There are 1000's of skills in gymnastics. Judges must know all of these Hieroglyphics for each skill as well as their point value. Skills are given a point value based on their difficulty. Easy skills are rated "A" skills, and the most difficult skills are rated "E". In addition to the rating of the skills, there is 'combination bonus' given for performing 2 or more difficult skills in a row. For example a gymnast performing 2 "C" skills in combination receive 0.10 in Bonus. All Compulsory skills at levels 4, 5, & 6 are all competing "A" level skills. Gymnasts do not perform "B" level skills until level 7 & 8. Level 9's & 10's perform C, D, & E level skills. Anyway, the Judges in gymnastics are typically very bright people (contrary to popular belief) to give an example, Terri Bailey who is Erie's only Optional Judge has a Masters Degree in Bioorganic Chemistry. Another gym friend Mark Welsh who typically judges our Star's & Stripes meet was the youngest Doctor to graduate in the country at age 21. Thus, they are very smart, and I think attracted to the sport for the challenge of both the mind and body. However this doesn't alleviate the fact that often the sport can be subjective. Thus, it is important to 'Kiss \$\$\$' occasionally and mind your P's & Q's. ~ To give an example though, a Judge on Compulsory Vault has to judge 90 kids in a session all of which compete 2 vaults (so they see 180 front Handsprings) and determine the rank—First thru last for all 90 gymnasts. They have to constantly ask themselves if that kid who competed 5th in the morning was slightly better or worse than that kid 80 kids later. It's a hard job. However as a coach, our sport is based on score, and it is these scores that determine who wins and who loses. This sometimes is the most frustrating aspect of coaching. ~ There are "Regional Differences" in the judging. Western PA

(where we are) tends to have the toughest judges and give the lowest scores. New York and Eastern Ohio have more lenient scoring. For example, let's say we go to this first meet in NY. Your child does a decent, but not great vault and receives an 8.50 for her efforts. The next meet we go to Pittsburgh and she does a great Vault, much better than the one in NY, and gets a 7.90. This is really hard not only to explain to a gymnast, but even harder to explain to a Parents. How do we explain that you child is getting better, however her score got worse. Coaches tend to take these fluctuations in stride. We ask that you as parents do as well. We mostly concern ourselves with "Rank". Maybe she did score a 7.9, but if that was the best vault of the day and gets gold, the score isn't that important then. ~~~ Most of the times the scoring is pretty fair. It can be difficult though when you don't know the rules. If you are in the stands, and are watching routines, you may see a kid stay on the beam and receive an 8.20. The next gymnast up falls off the beam and scores an 8.65. This can be frustrating to watch, however there often are good reasons for the difference in scores. The coaches know the rules, and will explain after the competition if you want to know why. Occasionally a score goes astray, and coaches have the right to "protest" the score. There is a formal procedure called an "Inquiry" that is filed if the coach does not think the score is correct. Sometimes there are very easily explainable reasons... for example the kid flashing the score is dyslexic. Instead of flashing a 9.60 to the crown, the kid flashes a 6.90. These things happen but are correct in the computer. But sometimes the judges do make mistakes. It is up to the coaches to file these if they see fit. This may not be how the parent sees it, and has led to many a parent / coach battle. We use this procedure sparingly. Some coaches are notorious for writing these inquiries. When they are overused, the coach and team become known as whiners, and often the Inquiry is dismissed—just as the boy who cries 'Wolf'.

19. JUDGES / OFFICIALS / BOUNDARIES— It should be noted... DO NOT APPROACH A JUDGE nor OFFICIAL at any meet. If you think there is a significant problem, you may only inquire to our coaching staff. Over exuberant parents of past often wish to tell officials what they think of the score the judge gave their daughter. This may be OK at a Hockey or Football game, however NOT at a gymnastics meet. Doing so can hurt the reputation of our gym, your daughters scores at the meet, a team penalty, and his/her scores at future meets. Also be careful what you say and where. We once had 2 mothers in the bathroom at a meet complaining about the "FAT @\$ Judge on Floor". While they tore her up, she politely remained in her stall long enough to hear the conversation—emerging just in time to see the Team Lightning logos on the parents shirts. Another Father followed a judge outside on a smoke break to tell her what he thought of her scores. He thought we were in Pittsburgh, so he would never see her again.
20. GYMNASTICS AND WEST VIRGINIA: Wrong, this is a very tight knit sport! There are many jokes about lineage / in-breeding in West Virginia (locally - Union City). Gymnastics is very much a National West Virginia. In some ways almost all Judges / Coaches / Owners are related in some way. Although on the floor at a Competition, we must keep up our Professional front, but behind the scenes, we are one big family. This Judge was a gymnast for this gym, later went to College with this coach, later worked for this gym.... Yes, we are rivals at meets, but beyond that we tend to stick together. Thus, many parents do not know this, and tend to shoot off at the mouth at one organization or another, often coming back to haunt themselves. Many of the Judges you see at the local meets might also judge your child at the State Meet. If you are sitting in the stands making derogatory comments about another coach / team / judge... you don't necessarily know who you are sitting next too. I will just throw this tidbit in too... There are only 2 gyms in Erie. Yes, of course we are both business and team rivals. However the owner and I have regular contact and similar stands on many issues. Often when a student burns a bridge either here or there, we talk and compare notes.
21. PARENT / GYMNAST BOUNDARIES — Gymnasts Floor / Parents Stands!!! Once the gymnast comes onto the floor, they are ours. There are boundaries at a meet, and Parents are **NOT PERMITTED** to come out onto the floor or near the equipment. These boundaries exist predominantly for safety reasons. During the meet the gymnasts are not permitted to go visit mom & dad in the stands. Do NOT encourage this. Also, do not chase them into the bathrooms. Parent interference typically does more harm than good. I would also like to point out that the intricate hand signals & gestures that some parents do to signal their children is distracting. There are some parents who have this intricate hand sign language that challenges even a third base coaches signals. Again, this typically does more harm than good. If you want to give the 'thumbs up' signal, that's OK by me, but stop at that!
22. SCORING— Typically immediately following your child's routine, they will flash the score your child received on that event. Sometimes they are on flashers, sometimes dry/erase boards. You should record this score. This score is added to the scores they will receive on the other events to determine the All Around (AA). The AA is the most prestigious award. Awards are given to the top percentage of gymnasts in each age level. At normal meets the number of awards is set by the host club. Some are very generous and make sure everyone gets something. Others only give a required 25%. There is a set of awards given for each event, and one set of awards for AA. So, they may have a great Vault and receive an award for that, and have a bad bar routine and not get an award for that event. These are referred to as "Individual Awards". Many meets are also —"Team Competitions". This is where the Team Attending the competition are directly competing

against each other. The Team Score also depends on the format of each meet. Most are determined by the top 3 (Optional and State) // 4 & 5 (for many Compulsory Invitationals) scores for each event. So, we take our top 3 Vault scores and add them together. Then we take our top 3 Bars scores and add them together.... The total of the scores for all the events is our "Team Score". There is typically a trophy / banner awarded to the top teams at the competition. Thus, even if a kid screws up an event, they often can still be part of the "Team Score". For example, my daughter Mackenzie was by no means a top AA gymnast. She was horrible on beam, so so on Floor and Vault, but she was awesome on bars. In many meets, Tina needed Mackenzies good bar score to help the Team Score. As a result, even if she didn't get as many medals as most kids, she was a very important part of the team. Kind of like the Kicker on a Football Team. Games are won and lost because of one persons efforts. Thus, they all are important to our success.

23. COACHING CHILDREN— **We will not Parent your child, so please don't Coach our Gymnast.** Too often parents want to help, and they fill their kids heads with tons of advice. Too often parents have an inflated and exaggerated memories of themselves as youth sports heroes. As a result, they want to pass off all of their supposed experience on their children. Problem is that a) most have no clue even the basic rules of the sport b) were no where near as good as they thought they were when they were young (Glory Days) c) usually just frazzle the child they are trying to help even more so than the child is already. In this business, I have cringed at some of the things I've witnessed over the years. I felt sorry for many of these kids. For a 2 hour ride to Pittsburgh they are drilled on (from well intentioned Moms & Dads) 'How to do it correctly'. Then, they are lectured for 2 hours on the way home about everything they did wrong. I feel even worse for the kids who have to go all the way to Philadelphia. The truth be told, no gymnast ever deliberately falls off the beam. However even the Chinese gymnasts who have trained their whole waking life fall off the beam at the Olympics. Gymnastics is hard! It is easy for the parent to tell the kid how to stay on the beam, however if I took some of these heroes and put them up on the beam and had them try even the simplest of gymnastics skills, I would scare these retired college football players. The advice we have for you is to be a Parent! Tell them you love them no matter how they do at the meet. Give them a big hug and tell them you are proud of them whether they win or lose. Buy them that special leo whether they stick the beam or fall 5 times. Applaud their efforts no matter how they did. If you really want to help, keep their mind distracted on the way to the meet. Keep them light and in a good mood. Play a car game or sing their favorite songs. Get them laughing and joking instead of being uptight and nervous. ~~~~ Personal Story — My son played Hockey. At some point he was selected for the special "Travel Hockey" Team - which is the equivalent of the gymnastics team your child is on. I am not all that up to date with the various Hockey lingo nor rules. I can however see when he made a mistake. For quite a bit, I (thinking as a Professional Coach) would talk to him after the game trying to help him by pointing out his mistakes. This soon would turn into a fight in the car with him forced to defend his mistakes. Half way home, no one was talking in the car in that we were all stewing. Somewhere along the line, he had a really good game. Thus I really didn't have any critique. We talked about all the good things he did at the game the whole way home. Everyone was happy, laughing, joking.... The next game, he played even better. Why? I think the compliments and encouragement made him even more confident. He became more secure with his position and was motivated to do even better. Since then, he significantly improved! I learned to bite my tongue and rarely ever critiqued any of his mistakes. He soon grew into a very good player, and we don't fight in the car rides anymore. If you want to help, review the good things they do at the meet and leave the criticizing to us coaches.
24. STUFFED ANIMALS- Bobby the bear, Ken & Barbie will have to stay in the car or stands during the meet. Please do not send the kids with comfort bears and toys when competing.
25. WATCH WHAT YOU SAY— Again, this is a very tight knit sport. Everyone knows everyone—coaches, gymnasts, judges, owners.... Many parents get themselves into trouble by shooting off their mouth in front of the wrong people. I have seen fights in the stands from Parents who play judge and comment on other teams routines only to find the Mom of the kids they were very critical of was sitting in front of them. I think it is due to the high amount of estrogen in the gym, however gossip in this sport and gym is rampant. I also mention the parents talking in the stalls of the bathroom as the judge sat in the next stall — Not good. If your child is good and sticks with this sport, he/she will see these same judges, coaches, owner, and these other parents for years to come. Many of our optional gymnasts and parents are friends with some of these kids on other teams. It's a case of familiarity in that they have traded places competitively, stayed at the same hotels, swim in the same pools... for years, that they have become friends. Many of them keep in touch via facebook & my space. Thus, keep emotions and egos in check.
26. AWARDS: The awards ceremony immediately follows the competition. The gymnasts are to remain in full dress for awards. Changing into jeans and a meet T-Shirt are frowned upon. The awards vary from meet to meet depending on the gym and the theme of the meet. Most meets award medals for the events and All Around. Some meets will give plaques with a spot to place metal stickers with the place. Many meets will give trophies or banners for All Around winners or Team. Lower level meets tend to be more generous with awards than are optional meets.

27. **HOTELS:** When attending a meet that requires a hotel stay, it is a great idea to all try to stay together. Typically the host club will recommend several hotels in their area. Often they work out deals for special rates at these hotels for gymnastics families. It is a good idea to make these reservations ASAP in that at many large meets, the hotels sell out quickly. EGC does not mandate where you stay. Some people have points on their CC for specific hotels, some have relatives in the town.... But it is nice when traveling to get everyone together for fun. Many times the kid decorate their door with Team Lightning Stuff, so take some paper, posters, and markers. Most often it is dinner and swimming, however each town offers something unique that the team often do together.
28. **AFTER MEET CELEBRATION:** Depending on the circumstances of the meet, we often get together after the meet for lunch or dinner before heading home. These are loosely organized, but common. For example I will use the upcoming Buffalo Meet for compulsory gymnasts. If the Team did very well at the meet in Buffalo we like to go out and celebrate our victories. The Level 5 meet is over at noon, everyone is hungry, so we find a nearby Applebee's, or Chucky Cheese, and the whole team goes. The coaches like to go as well, however in this case right after the 5's are finished, the Level 4's are coming in to start their meet. Thus, you 5 Parents will have to organize this in the Parking lot. When the Level 4's are done competing Tina and the coaches will probably want to go get something to eat and drink. See her after the meet.
29. **AGE DETERMINATION TIMES:** As mentioned above, please check your child's age determination for each meet. At some meets, including the several coming up, we are split into multiple sessions BY AGE with the same Levels. Remember, each meet may set the age date for their specific age groups. Some for example can be the 'age they are at that specific meet'. Other may use the age they are at the State Championship. Check with your coach if you are the least bit unsure.

30.

CULMINATING MEETS

LEVEL	CULMINATING MEET	DATE	LOCATION	HOST CLUB
Level 2	= No State Championship			
Level 3	= Level 3 Western State Championship	Apr. 28/29	Washington, PA	Gym Dandy's
Level 4	= Level 4 State Championship	Apr. 21/22	State College	Centre Elite
Level 5	= Level 5 State Championship	Apr. 14/15	Ursinus Coll. Collegeville	- Berks East
Level 6	= Level 6 State Championship	April 7/8	Hershey, PA	Aerials
Level 7	= Level 7 State Championship	Mar 24/25	Montgomery Coll.	Silvia's
Level 8	= Level 8 State Championship	Mar 10/11	All Star Sports / Gettysburg	- Rainbow Rider
Level 9/10	= State Championship	Mar 17/18	David Lawrence Conv.	Pittsburgh N. Stars
Men's	= Men's State Championship	Mar 17/18	David Lawrence Conv.	Pittsburgh N. Stars
Level 8	= Level 8 Regional Championship	April 11th, 2015	Newport News, VA	WorldClass
Level 9/10	= Regional Championship	Apr. 12-15	Sportsplex, Prince George, MD	
Level 9	= Level 9 Eastern National Championship	May 2-6	RIT - Rochester, NY	
Level 10	= JO National Championship	May 11-14	Duke Energy Conv.	Cincinnati, OH
Xcel	= Xcel State Championship	May 5/6	Beaver Coll. Pittsburgh	- Xquisite

MOBILITY SCORES:

Thanks, I hope you enjoyed the read.

PS: The following are Emergency Numbers... If you get lost, your child gets sick, or an emergency arises, you may contact the coach. Please realize that these are their "Personal Cell Phones", and they have personal lives & responsibilities outside the gym. This is for emergency use only. If you want to discuss scores, why your child isn't doing well, anything of that nature, contact the gym phone and we will schedule an appointment / call back.

- Compulsory Girls = Tina's Cell —814-504-0267
- Optional Girls = Doug's Cell —814-504-1102
- Xcel / Lev. 5 = Crystal's Cell -- 814-881-9352
- Men's Team = Justin's Cell — 814-449-7201