

*(v) Specific Coping Skills*

Every gymnast confronts a regular array of problems in day to day training that can waste a lot of practice time. When such a problem is identified, a specific strategy can be designed for how to deal with the problem anytime it occurs. The strategy may include a particular relaxation technique, a particular set of thoughts or images to recall, or some physical activity that helps the athlete to cope with the problem. If the coping strategy is practised, it becomes a training tool that allows more efficient use of training time.

**(c) Psychological Skills That Optimize Competitive Performance***(i) Desire to Perform*

The “desire to perform” on the competitive stage can make the difference between the lack-lustre and the brilliant performance. The gymnast must develop this within himself.

*(ii) Arousal Control*

In competition, the gymnast has to regulate his arousal level. This might be to reduce nervousness; or to “pick oneself up”. The skill to do this can be learned, but requires a thought-out, progressive set of learning experiences to master it.

*(iii) Concentration (Focus)*

The ability to concentrate on the performance of routines amidst all the distractions of a competition is essential. The skill is not learned in one meet, but rather in a series of performance experiences beginning with very low stress environments.

*(iv) Mental Rehearsal*

In a few words, a gymnast who is well practised at mental imagery and mental practice of skills can use this ability to rehearse routines both prior to and during the competition.

*(v) Specific Coping Skills*

There are many — a great many — distractors, problems, and frustrations that can be anticipated as certainties that will occur in competitions. Once identified, specific step-by-step coping strategies can be worked out for each problem and practised prior to the meet. The gymnast, knowing he has a strategy for dealing with most potential problems will go into competition more confident, and of course much better able to cope with the problems that do occur.

**3.1.2 The Physical Component**

In Level 1 we made the point that a gymnast cannot expect to do gymnastics unless he is physically prepared. This holds true more than ever at the highly competitive level. No gymnast can perform the complex skills required of an elite athlete without first developing the necessary strength, power, flexibility and endurance. In practice, as well as in competition, we see gymnasts struggling with skills they cannot do — not for lack of technique — but simply for lack of physical conditioning.

The physical conditioning aspects should start long before the skill is taught. This is why in our planning it is necessary for the coach to look at what skills are required a year ahead and begin the physical preparation as early as possible *before* introducing the skills.

The training specifics of physically conditioning athletes are outlined in the Technical and Theory Manuals of Levels 1 and 2. We will add additional points under three headings:

- (a) Physical Conditioning to Permit Learning
- (b) Physical Conditioning to Optimize Training Time
- (c) Physical Conditioning for the Competitive Day(s)

**(a) Physical Conditioning to Permit Learning**

A gymnast must “learn” both skills and routines. In learning skills, the physical conditioning focus is on the strength, power and flexibility demands of the particular skills. Figure 2 reviews the prescription factors for working with these as presented in Levels 1–3.