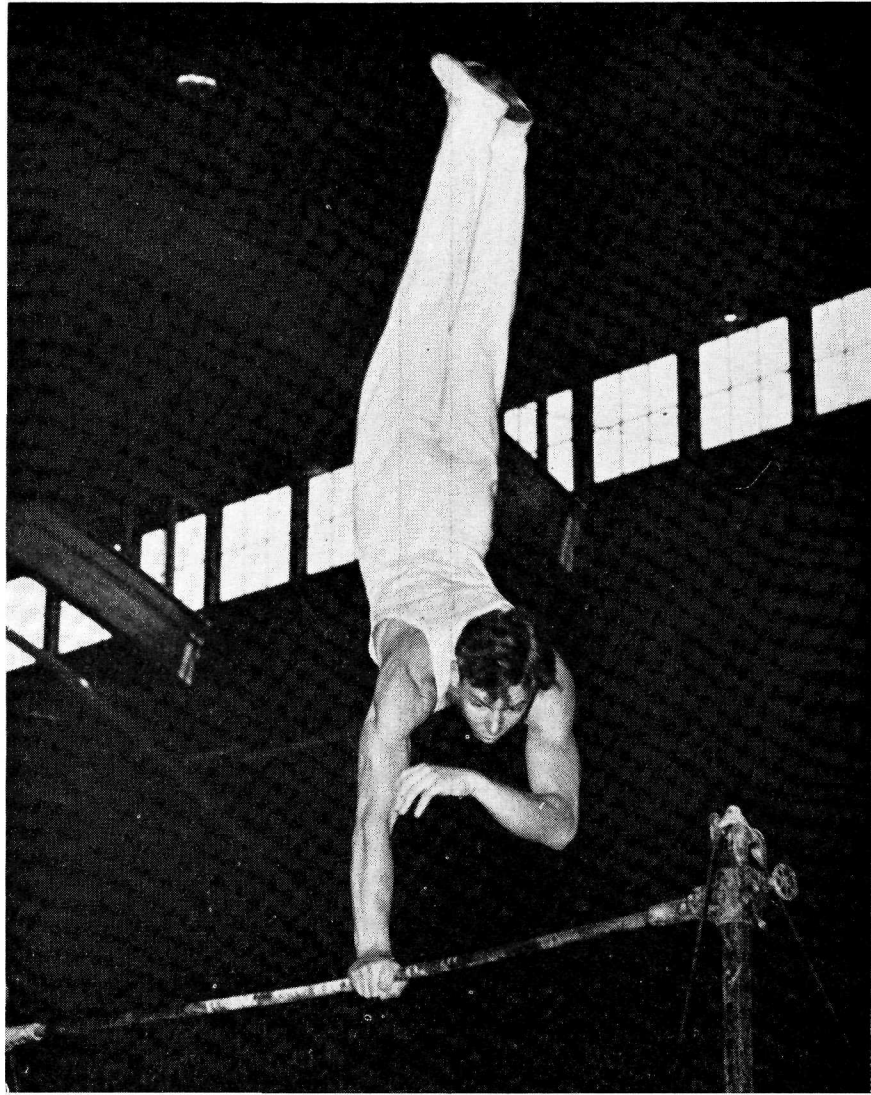


GYMNASTICS AND TUMBLING



*WILLIAM ROETZHEIM, Florida State University, 1949 National A. A. U. Gymnastic  
Champion, Illinois Navy Pier, Photo by Al Augustyn, Chicago, Illinois*

## CHAPTER I

# Brief History of Gymnastics\*

### EARLIEST HISTORY

Perhaps the Chinese were the first people to develop activities that resembled gymnastics. Records indicate that two systems of training were employed, military and medicinal. Histories of Egypt, Japan, Persia and India mention physical exercises in connection with preparation for war. In fact, Egypt has left tangible proof, in the form of pictures of pyramids and balancing, of the art of gymnastics as it was practiced 2100-2000 B.C.

#### **Greeks**

The early Greeks, however, gave glory to physical training in general and to gymnastics in particular. The word "gymnastics," meaning "naked art," comes from the early Greeks. So much importance was attached to gymnastics that the gymnasium, an outdoor meeting place for athletic contests, was the seat of Greek intellectual development. All-round development of the individual was the goal sought, a perfectly trained, hardened, disciplined body, a citizen and a warrior worthy of highest Greek standards.

Exercises in Greek gymnastics were based on natural movements and included running, throwing, wrestling, boxing, climbing, jumping and work with weights (halteres). Weight lifting and jumping with weights were popular activities as well as others involving use of the sling, the spear, and the bow and arrow. Dancing and games also were part of the program. The Greeks worked with apparatus rather than upon it.

#### **Romans**

The early Romans, having seen the favorable effect of Greek gymnastics, introduced rigid physical training into their military program. Among other apparatus, they made use of a wooden horse upon which to practice mounting and dismounting. The activities, executed while holding a drawn sword or lance, left no doubt as to the purpose of training. The words of the Romans, conquerors and warriors that they were, give a clear picture of the motive behind the activity, "It appears to be play, but it is for the Fatherland."

### MIDDLE AGES

The decadence of both the Greek and Roman civilizations was followed by a long period of asceticism when strenuous physical activity for the common people was discouraged.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the knights, representing the warrior class, were

\* For further historical information consult the works of K. A. Knudsen and Leopold F Zwarg.

probably the only group participating in organized physical activity. Main activities included climbing, vaulting, riding, swimming, archery, climbing on ladders, poles and ropes, tilting and jousting, wrestling, fencing, jumping and dancing.

"There is no record of any system of physical training for the common people during the Middle Ages. However, certain apparatus was used by some medieval as well as ancient people. . . . Using other persons as apparatus, human towers were formed during sieges and at public performances. Acrobatic stunts have been known at all times."

### MODERN TIMES

Modern physical education begins with the work of a group of leaders who were interested in education in general, but in physical education in particular—Johann Basedow (1723-1790), Johann Guts Muths (1759-1839), Gerhard Vieth (1763-1836) and Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827).

#### *Johann Basedow, 1723-1790*

Basedow conducted the first gymnastics as part of the school work in Europe. He was the first modern writer and teacher of organized gymnastics of whom there are records. He regarded directed physical activities as a means to a complete education embracing both body and mind.

#### *Johann Guts Muths, 1759-1839*

Guts Muths, an educator and "the great grandfather of gymnastics," using Greek fundamentals and adding new movements, published the first book on gymnastics, "Gymnastics for Youth." He seems to have successfully combined idealism, materialism and realism. His teaching methods provided for children as well as adults and included carefully selected exercises for girls. Commenting upon physical education in his Encyclopedia of Bodily Exercises, he stated,

You shall be a sane supervisor and master of your body; you shall train it to vigorous manhood, making it skillful and obedient to all that is good so that you may grow to be a true man for yourself, your own kin, and the society in which you live.

His first gymnasium was out of doors, and in it were see-saws, climbing poles, ropes, balancing beams and vaulting apparatus. The rope ladder, also a part of his equipment, probably was introduced by Basedow, who had realized its usefulness on board ship in the seaport town of Hamburg. The oblique wooden ladder also was used.

#### *Gerhard Vieth, 1763-1836*

Vieth, a mathematician and a scholar possessing an analytical mind, adhered closely to the Guts Muths system of gymnastics. He published an encyclopedia of bodily exercises (1794-5), in which he stressed the mental, moral and physical value of exercise. Passive exercises, "lying, sitting, swinging and being carried by means of mechanical devices, also bathing, massaging and the hardening of the body, . . ." and active exercises, "walking, climbing, jumping, and vaulting," were included in his system. He treated vaulting in detail and described side and long vaults, front, rear, squat, straddle and numerous other vaults and mounts.

Vieth further described balance beams, jumping ropes, climbing ropes and poles, the horse, the table, and the buck (evidently a form of leap frog). Since he wrote of vaulting over horizontal poles at different heights, it would indicate that early form of the horizontal and parallel bars were used as apparatus.

#### ***Johann Pestalozzi, 1746-1827***

Pestalozzi's greatest contribution was to general education, but he was the founder of free exercises and of calisthenics. He believed that methodical exercising trained the pupil intellectually, morally and esthetically. It is of interest to note, however, that the gymnastics of Guts Muths were practiced upon Pestalozzi playgrounds.

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries introduced a new era. The world was in an industrial, educational, and political turmoil. Germany was suffering keenly from Napoleonic victories. Appeals were made to her leaders to turn to education as a means to restore her prestige, and as a result, Germany eventually became a leader in educational thought and practice.

The period seems to have given impetus to physical education in general and to gymnastics in particular in countries other than Germany. Aside from Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852) and Adolph Spiess (1810-1858), both of Germany, leaders of the times included Pehr Henrik Ling (1776-1839), Sweden; Archibald Maclaren (1820-1884), England; Phokion Clias (1782-1854), Switzerland; Francis Amoros (1770-1848), France; and Franz Nachteggall (1777-1847), Denmark.

#### ***Friedrich Jahn, 1778-1852***

Jahn, the "Turn Father" of German gymnastics, presented a plan to the German people whereby he hoped to promote national unity and physical strength through Turnen societies, clubs of strong national character.

Jahn was an enthusiastic, far-seeing teacher and leader. He was the first man to organize and popularize physical skill with a view to arousing the national spirit, to promoting self-discipline and bodily strength, and to stimulating the mental vigor of Germany's young manhood. He wanted to create "liberty loving, social and independent thinking. . . ." This he hoped to do "by strengthening the degenerated muscle groups of the body, thus liberating man from the shackles of an environment that made him feeble, that allowed his muscles, and consequently his mental vigor, to decay."

To this end he devoted his energies. Unlike Guts Muths, who encouraged gymnastics among children, Jahn's program provided for adolescents and adults only. His ardor brought the youth of the city to his playground, the first of its kind, where he imbued them with the spirit of self-reliance, encouraging keen rivalry in skill and in strength. Open air activity was preferred. When the need arose for apparatus upon which to play, Jahn and his students invented it, and thus he is credited with introducing the horizontal bar, the parallel bars, the side horse with pommels, the jumping standard and pits, balance beams, ladders and vaulting bucks.

Jahn made no attempt to have his program adopted by the schools. Even had he done so, the government very likely would have frowned upon his efforts because his societies were not in favor at that time. In 1842, ten years before Jahn's death, gymnastics were introduced into Germany's public schools, but they were of a stilted and formal nature.

***Adolph Spiess, 1810-1858***

Spiess of Germany, trained in Pestalozzian methods, adapted both Guts Muths and Jahn gymnastics to his classes of boys and girls in Burgdorf, Switzerland. He added marching and free exercises set to musical rhythms, which aided in discipline and erect carriage. His book, "The Science of Gymnastics," contained graded exercises for boys and girls of all ages designed to develop the entire musculature. Through his efforts, gymnastics became a school subject in Switzerland, and Spiess is known as the "Father of School Gymnastics."

Spiess did not favor Jahn's squad-leader plan, preferring to employ trained teachers instead, but these lacked the keen enthusiasm, foresight and ability that were characteristic of Jahn and Spiess. As a result, a formal attitude became apparent and has handicapped gymnastics ever since. The freedom and the ardor and the wide scope of activities which under Spiess' personal teaching had included music appreciation, playing of games, hiking, and outdoor exercises gradually narrowed down to a much smaller scale.

The factor that Jahn had so earnestly encouraged, a rich, full, stimulating, outdoor, informal physical training program for all, was lost sight of when the work was carried on by less competent teachers.

***Pehr Ling, 1776-1839***

Ling, the father of Swedish gymnastics, patriotically attempted to imbue the youth of Sweden with the need of physical fitness as Jahn had done in Germany. He believed in the therapeutic and corrective value of the activity and he hoped to see gymnastics improve the weak as well as the strong. He stipulated that exercises should be prescribed for the individual rather than for the group; that a system of gymnastics should be based on an accurate knowledge of the effect of the various exercises on the human organism; and that teachers should know the purpose and effect of every exercise upon the organism. He felt that Jahn's system led to complicated movements and did not lend itself to accurate recognition of causes and effects. He endeavored to simplify the activity in accordance with his speculative theory, derived from a study of anatomy and physiology. He invented apparatus to fit his theory, permitting simple movements such as climbing, vaulting, lifting and balancing, all done at command. "For his purpose Ling invented the stall bars, the boom, the saddle, the window ladder, the low combination bench, ribba and the vaulting box. These are known today as Swedish apparatus. To these were added the horse, the horizontal, vertical and oblique ropes, and climbing poles."

Suited to formal group instruction, where all can work upon command, combinations of exercises on Swedish apparatus are somewhat limited. The regular apparatus, however, can be adapted readily to individual differences and permits a much wider scope of activity, depending upon the skill and creativeness of the performer. Stunts are appealing and interesting to the performer.

Hjalmar Ling, a son, developed his father's system further and originated the stall bars. Swedish Corrective Gymnastics did not come from Ling but from one of his students, Branting.

***Archibald Maclaren, 1820-1884***

Maclaren, an English educator, advocated the Jahn system of apparatus activities

to supplement games when he wrote his military manual at the request of the English government.

***Phokion Clias, 1782-1854***

Clias, a Swiss teacher who promoted gymnastics in England and France as well as in Switzerland, was not original in his views. His written work proved to be a composite of that of Guts Muths and Jahn. However, he mentioned the giant stride for the first time in professional literature.

***Francis Amoros, 1770-1848***

Amoros, a Spaniard, was responsible for the establishment of gymnastics in France. His methods were formal and were patterned after those of Pestalozzi. "Amoros must have been one of the first to use the trapeze, the rings, the knotted ropes, the inclined boards, a form of giant-stride and strength test machines for physical training purposes."

***Franz Nachtegall, 1777-1847***

Nachtegall, the father of Danish gymnastics, directed in Copenhagen the first recorded training school for teachers of gymnastics, known as the Military Gymnastic Institute. Some of the activities included "exercises upon hanging ladders, rope ladders, climbing masts and poles; also balancing, tug of war, and vaulting. For the vaulting, a wooden horse was used. Mats were placed around the horse to insure soft landing, and a teacher caught the vaulters who missed. This seems to be the first report upon the use of mats, although they were undoubtedly used long before."

It is of interest to note that throughout history, the rise and fall of nations has seemed to coincide with the rise and fall of the physical stamina of their people. Greece rose to the height of her glory (leaving her indelible mark upon the world) during that period when the physical vigor, the patriotic zeal, the independence and freedom of her people were at their height. Athletic professionalism for the few and a lack of strenuous participation among the many brought about a decline in the national physical stamina and a consequent decline in the power of Greece. The same may be said of the great Roman Empire and of Egypt. History indicates, too, that a decadent nation realizes the costly blunder it has made only after defeat at the hands of a physically superior enemy. A period of reorganization follows and attempts are made to imbue the nation with the need of physical improvement.

In many instances a country has been able to save itself and has even become more powerful than previously by realizing its weakness. Such was Germany's case after her humiliation by Napoleon's forces. The great national movement introducing Jahn's Turnen Societies for the physical improvement of youths and adults of military age was an outcome of Germany's defeat. And more recently, in our own country, the years following World War I saw a surge of enthusiasm for and an insistence upon improved and sustained physical condition.

It sometimes seems, however, that a defeated country maintains its patriotic zeal for physical improvement, while the victor leans toward promises and good intentions rather than vigorous activity. The United States was no exception. For a few years following World War I, physical education was stressed, but gradually the

nation as a whole seemed to lose interest in the need of sustained physical fitness, and gave little heed to leaders who tried to stimulate interest in rugged, big-muscle activities. World War II awakened this country to its shortcomings. Almost immediately, physical fitness became one of the big issues of the times.

### PIONEERS OF GYMNASTICS IN THE UNITED STATES

The pioneers of gymnastics in the United States were: Charles Beck (1798-1866), Charles Follen (1796-1840) and Francis Lieber (1800-1872). These Germans, coming to this country at the invitation of American educators, were followers of Father Jahn. They established gymnasiums similar to the Jahn pattern at the Round Hill School, Northampton, at Harvard University, and at the Boston gymnasium. With the arrival of thousands of German immigrants, gymnastic clubs called "Turnvereins" were formed in many of the larger cities. "In 1850 these societies formed the North American Turner Bund (Gymnastics Union) . . . What these societies . . . accomplished by their untiring zeal and unselfish devotion is little known. . . . It is certain that for some years the Turners were the only . . . promoters of scientific physical education for the public schools. A normal college for the training of teachers, the oldest in the country, was established by the Turners in 1866."

The Young Men's Christian Association made a great contribution to the development of physical education by installing apparatus in their gymnasiums. In 1887 the International Training School (now Springfield College) at Springfield, Massachusetts, established a Physical Training Department which gives students a thorough background of gymnastic technique.

Dudley A. Sargent (1840-1924) greatly influenced the advancement of gymnastics. His work at Harvard University was largely anthropometrical and corrective in character. In 1881 the Sargent School was established in order to train women teachers.

The American Turners have had perhaps the greatest effect on physical education. Through their efforts, physical education was introduced into the schools. The thirty-six national tournaments and the thirty-nine national conventions that have been held in different sections of the country by the American Turners have spread their influence. The oldest active Turner organization is the Cincinnati Central Turners, which dates from 1848. The Boston Turn Verein and the Philadelphia Turners followed in 1849. Eighty-five Turner societies have been organized for more than fifty years.

In 1865, in order to train teachers, the American Turners organized the Normal College of the American Gymnastic Union, an institution now affiliated with Indiana University.

The Swiss American Gymnastic Association also has favorably affected the development of gymnastics. The Swiss Turn Verein of Hudson County has won more national championships than any other club in the country.

The American Sokol was introduced in St. Louis in 1865, three years after it had been founded in Prague, by Dr. Miroslav Tyrs. Chicago and New York instituted branches in 1866 and 1867, respectively. Today the United States claims a total Sokol membership of 100,000, and throughout the world there are approximately one million members.



The use of apparatus in American public schools and colleges was impeded by three main influences:

1. About 1800 Dio Lewis introduced exercises that did not require apparatus and the schools accepted them enthusiastically.
2. The Swedish influence about 1900 emphasized calisthenics.
3. The trend toward recreational activities about 1920, following World War I.

The Y.M.C.A. has continued to promote gymnastics by making provision for the activity in practically all of their organizations.

Other influences that have increased interest during the past two decades have been the exhibition teams in different parts of the country. Groups that have made the chief contributions are: The University of Illinois Gymkana Troupe;\* Springfield College; Stroudsburg (Pennsylvania) State Teachers College; Brooklyn (New York) Central Y.M.C.A., and the community circus of Gainesville, Texas. The Chicago Parks have successfully encouraged exhibitions and have experienced widespread enthusiasm on the playgrounds. High schools, too, have realized the value of exhibition gymnastics. Perhaps the outstanding programs in high schools in the United States have been in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Another important influence in the development of competitive gymnastics in the United States has been the Northwestern Gymnastic Society, which was organized in December, 1909. In April, 1910 the Society conducted its first annual gymnastic contest, and, except for the year 1919 a contest has been held annually.

Since shortly after the end of World War I, gymnastics was denied its rightful place in the total program of the public schools and colleges in this country. The trend has been toward mild recreational activities for the majority while strenuous competition was encouraged for the small minority. The emphasis on recreation brought about a program revision wherein practically all features, good and bad alike, of the old program were eliminated. One result was a dearth of good gymnastic teachers and inspiring gymnastic programs.

The Naval Aviation Physical Training Program made great strides toward remedying the situation. It demanded strenuous conditioning activities in order to maintain the acme of physical fitness. A balanced program of physical education should include team sports, individual sports, rhythms, aquatics, combatives, and gymnastics. In all sections of the United States gymnastics are being promoted. Recently the Southern Gymnastic League was founded with a view to promoting gymnastics in eleven southern states. Florida State University and Georgia Tech, among others, are making favorable progress.

\* The University of Illinois Varsity Gymnastic team during the Gymkana era under Hartley Price won four N.C.A.A. and two N.A.A.U. team championships.