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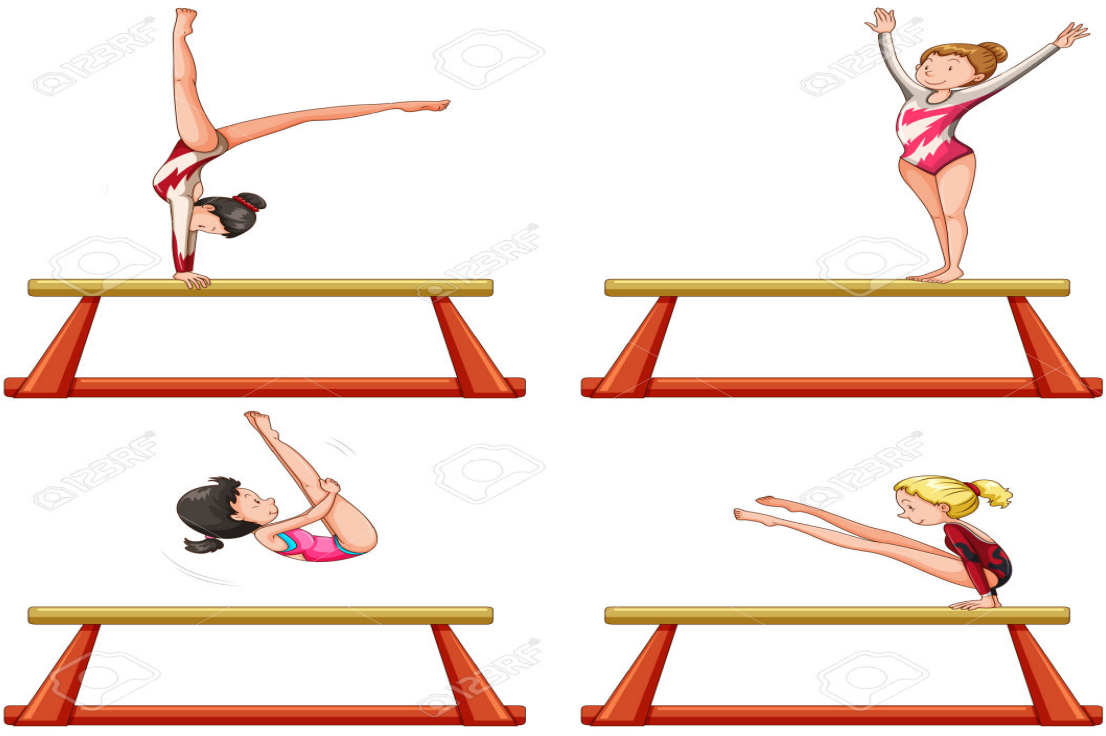
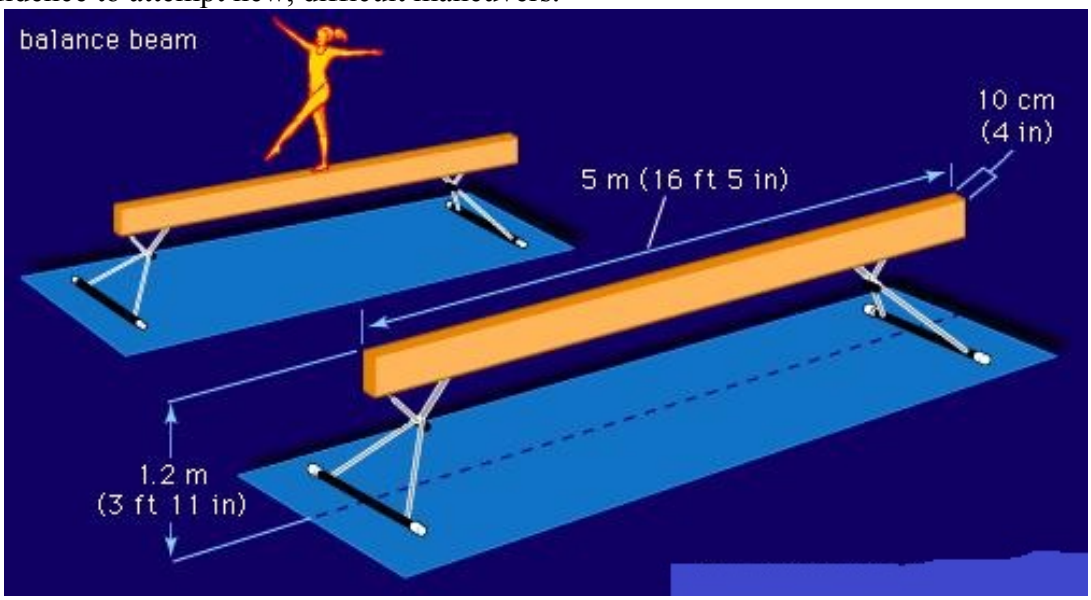
Lecture Title
Balance Beam – 1

Introduction
The balance beam is a women's only event in artistic gymnastics. It is a popular event that is sure to raise the blood pressure of all who watch it being performed, as girls execute multiple spins, flips and leaps across a four inch wide apparatus. Although often a favorite for gymnastics fans, the beam it is not necessarily a favorite among gymnasts—it is difficult to perform such complex skills on such a narrow piece of equipment, where even the slightest bobble can take you out of medal contention. To better understand how to approach the balance beam, it is important to know its history, the rules and regulations of the event, as well as the specific elements that make up a successful routine. Here is the ins-and-outs of the balance beam.



2. Measurement

Today, the balance beam used in competition must conform to certain standards. The International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG) requires that each beam is supported by an elastic overlay with a cushioning that is between 15mm and 30mm thick. The ends of the five-meter long beam must have rounded edges and the beam itself is required to stand 1.2m off the ground. In addition the beam must have a landing mat at the end that measures 17m by 4m. When learning difficult tumbling passes, gymnasts often use a beam that is thicker and lower than competitive standards. Generally, such beams are only six inches off the ground and have up to one-half inch of padding on the surface. This difference gives gymnasts an added bit of confidence to attempt new, difficult maneuvers.



Daily Needs in Practice

Certain elements are required within a competitive balance beam routine. Each routine needs to last at least 60-seconds, but cannot exceed more than 90-seconds. A gymnast must use the entire length of the beam and perform multiple acrobatic elements.

In lower level competitions (competitive levels 4-7), routines are predesigned and every gymnast must compete the same series of skills. At the elite level, gymnasts get to choose their own routine, but must still include a sequence of required elements.

Here are some of those skills:

- **3. Acrobatic or Gymnastics Series**
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- **Acrobatic or gymnastics series**: This can include elements such as a back handspring followed by a back salto (flip), or a turn followed by a leap.
- **360-degree turn**: The gymnast must complete a 360-degree turn on one foot.
- **180-degree forward split**: This element is completed during a jump or leap.

Each element is ranked in difficulty from “A” easiest (back walkover) to “E” hardest (back full). Gymnasts may add more challenging skills to their routine or link difficult elements together to increase their chances for a high score.

Scoring

Judges evaluate the entire beam routine, from the moment the gymnast salutes until the moment her feet land in the dismount. Judges want to see poise and grace combined with balance, coordination and skill. Good body posture and tight form are also highly valued.
Judges keep track of the required elements and deduct points if those elements are not present. If a gymnast falls from the beam, it is an automatic one point deduction. If more difficult elements are combined together in a series, judges will award points accordingly – as long as the execution of the tricks is done well. The last (and very important) element a judge is looking for is a stuck landing. After the dismount, which should include multiple flips and twists in order to score high, the feet must stay firmly planted on the ground. If there is any bobble, or any movement of the feet, the judges will deduct points.

Basic Information

To the uninitiated, performing on the beam looks simple. In reality, however, it requires superb balance and concentration. Once a young gymnast has mastered the basic skills involved in a beam routine, she will have made great progress towards becoming a first-class gymnast. To the spectator, a performance on the balance beam seems the most leisurely of all gymnastics exercises. The gymnast gives the impression of taking her time; now here in her routine is there a place for speed as there is on the other three apparatus. No wonder the beam is beloved of photographers, because this serenity which is so much a feature of beam work can be captured by the camera without much difficulty. However, the role of the beam has changed in recent times so that it is now more than a means for women to demonstrate simple balances. It is true to say that almost any tumbling skill which is performed on the floor can be executed by top gymnasts on the beam.
The Swedish pioneer PherHenrik ling used a version of the beam in the mid-nineteenth century. Apart from developing a sence of balance, the beam was used to encourage good posture, co-ordination and grace. The apparatus was unique in that it was designed exclusively with women in mind. There is no equivalent of the beam in men's gymnastics. The greatest advance in beam technique has been, as could be expected, during the last twenty-five years. The world's top gymnasts today show what a versatile piece the bean is by the range of movement which can be performed on it.
But balance is still the key to successful performing on the beam. The gymnast has to perform on a long, narrow platform which is 5m long and only 10cm wide. What is more, the beam is 1.2m high off the ground and thus the young gymnast can be forgiven if at first she finds the idea of performing on the beam daunting.
Let us see what the beam exercise requires of the gymnast.

Composition

The beam exercise is essentially one of balance composed of acrobatic and gymnastics movements. According to the code of points, the exercise should contain elements of balance, turns and pivots (one being a 360^0 turn moving forward, backward or sideways), leaps, jumps and hops (one of these must be a large one), steps and running combinations, acrobatic parts and connections, and elements close to the beam and above the beam.
The gymnast's routine must also keep to these rules:

1. There must be harmonious and dynamic change between the groups of movements.
2. The gymnast must avoid any repetition of movements but if she does repeat an element, she must perform it with a different connection or linkage.
3. Difficulties must be spread throughout the entire exercise.
4. The gymnast must use the whole length of the beam.

5. The mount and dismount must be in harmony to the difficult of the exercise.
6. The gymnast should try not to use too many sitting and lying positions.

Rhythm

While the rhythm of the exercise must vary from lively to slow it must always flow smoothly without interruption. The gymnast should be careful not be perform an exercise that is not only slow and monotonous but also punctuated with pauses. Three stops are, however permitted during the exercise:

1. After planned, technically good and consciously held positions.
2. After any acrobatic stand as the headstand or shoulder stand.
3. After gymnastic stands with held positions at the end of the movement.

Pauses before and after acrobatic elements can be penalized by 0.20 points each.

4.Duration

The time limit of the beam exercise is between 1.15 min and 1.35 min. timekeeping start when the gymnast's feet have left the floor or springboard and finishes when they touch the floor again as she finishes the routine. A signal warns the gymnast whenshe reaches 1.30 min and again when she comes up to 1.35. If she has dismounted of the exercise will be regarded as corresponding to the rules. The code of point's further states that all elements executed after 1.35 minutes will not be evaluated. If the required difficulties have not been executed during the 1.35 minutes will not been executed during the 1.35 minutes, an additional deduction of 0.30 points or 0.60 points will be made, depending on the value of the difficulty.

Falls

Rarely does a competition pass without a gymnast falling from the beam. If a gymnast falls, she will be penalized~~as indicated below~~. She may, however,continue the exercise, if she remounts within 10 seconds. If she fails to remount after the 10 seconds are up, the exercise is considered to have ended.

Approach

The gymnast is allowed one additional approach run if she has not touched the beam on her first.

Deductions

As with the other apparatus, the competitive gymnast must be aware of the penalties she may incur during a beam routine.

1. Fall on the floor or on the beam: 0.50 points.
2. Supports with the hands on the beam to maintain balance: 0.50 points.
3. Touching beam after run (without mounting): 0.30 points.
4. Touching beam with hands to maintain balance: 0.30 points.
5. Support of a leg against the side of the beam: 0.20 points.
6. Additional movements of the body to maintain balance: 0.30 points.
7. Additional arm or leg movements to maintain balance 0.20 points.
8. More than three unmotivated stops: each time 0.20 points.
9. Poor head position during entire exercise: 0.20 points.
10. One full turns (360^0) or large leap missing: each 0.20 points.
11. Exercise too long (after 1.35 min), exercise considered finished: 0.30 points.
12. Exercise too short (less than 1.15 min): for each missing second 0.05 points.
13. Coach present on podium during exercise: 0.50 points.
14. Coach signals gymnast: 0.30 points.

15. Monotony of rhythm in part: 0.20 points.
16. Monotony during the exercise: 0.50 points.

Basic Training

In body preparation for beam work, the gymnast must aim to acquire suppleness, strength and spring. These qualities are, of course, among those she needs for the other apparatus. But now the gymnast also needs balance.

It has been noted that it takes courage for the young gymnast to perform on a narrow chest-high above the ground. Therefore the first skill that the gymnast should acquire in beam activity is that of becoming used to moving on the beam. But no-one expects the gymnast to begin her beam training on the high beam. If there is no low beam available, a bench such as those used in schools can be used, particularly for skills involving rolls, cartwheels and handstands.

One very important point about training for the beam is to remember that all skills should be first learned at floor level. Then and only then should the gymnast perform them on the low beam before moving to a higher beam. The gymnast's coach will make sure that whatever beam is used there are adequate mats under the beam during training and that practicing new skills is adequately supervised. It is sometimes helpful to the coach if the gymnast wears trousers as this gives the coach something to hold on to.

The gymnast must realize that such training takes a long time. But she must also realize that, in the long run, the time will have been well spent- which takes us back to the initial practice, getting used to the beam and moving with confidence and control. Even walking must be controlled. The gymnast must concentrate on her posture, keeping her head up and her back straight. She should study pictures of well-known gymnastics stars to see how they hold themselves during beam exercises. Watch, too, the top performers in major competitions. See how they walk elegantly, with arms positioned to match their movements. The gymnast must be prepared to practice, practice and practice, if she intends to master the beam with any competence.

Once the gymnast has learned to walk on the beam and turn on her toes at the end of the beam, she can begin to practice running steps in the same manner. Rhythm and pace can be varied, once the gymnast can execute basic run, and dance steps included. Remember to vary the turns by positions of the body and ~~by position to vary the turns by position of the body and~~ by position on the beam. For example, turns can be performed while kneeling, squatting or sitting; and the gymnast can turn not just at the end of the beam but in the middle as well, proceeding backward or forwards.

All training should include elements of a routine as specified in the code of points. Thus it is useful for the gymnast to tackle mounting and dismounting at an early stage. A good tip for learning beam mounts and dismounts is to practice them on a box horse before trying them on the beam. Two examples are the forward roll mount and the handstand mount.

Forward Roll Mount

Once a gymnast has practiced a forward roll on a bench, she should try jumping up from a springboard to forward roll on a box horse. She must remember to 'land' on one leg as there is no room on the beam for two.

Handstand Mount

In the same way, a handstand mount can be practiced. When two boxes are placed end to end. The gymnast can move from the handstand into a roll, turn or forward walkover the tops of the boxes. The move to handstand from the springboard can be varied, too: the gymnast can straddle or pike up.

Two box horses placed end to end can be used, too, for practicing dismounts such as the round off dismount.

5. Round off Dismount

The gymnast goes through a cartwheel on the end of the beam but in the handstand position turns facing the direction of travel so that she completes the lending facing the beam.
~~Other examples of mounts and dismounts are given below~~. For the reminder of the routine, the gymnast should assemble elements as outlined in the section on composition. She will be able to perform many of these movementsfrom her training for the floor exercise. Essential parts of the beam exercise are jumps, hops, and leaps: these should be varied and practiced on the floor first. Examples of leaps are stride leaps, split leaps, stag leaps, cat leaps, scissors leaps, side straddle jumps. Many other movements in the floor exercise can be used in the gymnast's beam routine; this will depend on how well she has mastered them 'on the ground'. As with the floor exercise, the gymnast and her coach must search for a routine which is fluent in performance and heightened with original links. Once more we come back to the word balance. The beam demands balance in performance, balance in content.
Once the gymnast has composed her routine, she must practice it constantly. An advanced gymnast expects to spend at least an hour going over her exercise or polishing up skills, there is one that the wise gymnasts will not neglect- the art of falling to the floor from the height of the beam. There is always a risk of injury if the gymnast does not learn to fall properly.
The grouping of movements on the beam for scoring purpose are:
Mounts, Leaps, Stands, Body Waves, Turns, Walkover Cartwheels, Rolls, Handstands and Dismounts.
~~Below are~~ examples of elements which the gymnast will find useful in preparing a competition routine.
List of Movements

- Two-legged squat mount
- Straddle mount
- Straddle over mount
- Squat on mount
- Y-scale
- Arched stand
- Arabesque
- Forward body wave
- Full turn on one leg, free above 90^0
- Forward roll
- Backward roll
- Free forward roll
- Handstand roll
- Cartwheel
- Free cartwheel
- Back walkover
- Forward walkover
- Aerial walkover

- Handspring
- Back flip
- Back tucked somersault
- Free walkover dismount
- Handstand ¼ turn dismount
- Front somersault dismount
- Back tucked somersault dismount

Physical skills

Beam requires precision, steadiness, and fearlessness. It requires a gymnast who can tumble, leap, and dance in a straight line on a piece of leather-covered wood that is approximately four feet off the ground and about four inches wide. She has to demonstrate anxiety control, flexibility, grace and power all the same time. Beam probably requires the most diverse skills of all the women's events.

The mental side

Beam is often seen as the most difficult event. Just staying on the beam sometimes becomes a primary goal. It is easy to slip and fall and even easier to have a major wobble. Anxiety can have a tremendous effect on a gymnast's performance. Inability to control anxiety can be a gymnast's downfall on this event more than one can increase the anxiety. It is not surprising with all the aerial (and sometimes blind) moves that fear of injury can hamper a gymnast's beam progress and performance.

Anxiety management

From a psychological perspective, the ability to manage anxiety is probably the key to being a great beam worker. Many gymnasts can learn spectacular moves on the beam and can do them in workouts, but will wobble or fall, or both, during a meet because of the anxiety. In fact, gymnasts often make errors during competition on moves they never miss in workout because of the added anxiety.

Summary

Finally, once the gymnast has acquired confidence, poise and ability on the beam. She must remember that the beam is a medium of expression. In other words, she must perform as her true self; not as an automaton or puppet. The great performers on the beam hold their audiences spellbound not merely by agility. They project themselves so that their personalities provide the final touch in a sequence more related to art than to sport. From them, the young gymnast can learn to approach her beam routine in a relaxed and tranquil manner. It is particularly important that she does not show tension in her face. The answer is, as always in gymnastics, to be in complete control of one's movement's thorough and painstaking preparation.