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Lecture Title

Uneven Bars

Script

Introduction

The uneven parallel bars are an event only performed by women in artistic gymnastics. The apparatus includes two bars set apart at different heights and gymnasts perform multiple flips, twists and release moves to transition from one bar to the next.

For many, the uneven bars (bars for short) are one of the hardest events to learn and master. They require strength, balance, coordination, courage and timing—skills tested one by one in the specific required elements. But regardless of its challenges, the bars are a favorite event among gymnasts and have become a valued and often specialized event for many of the greatest athletes in the sport.

History

The uneven parallel bars have changed dramatically over the years, both in terms of the apparatus itself and the skills performed throughout bar routines.

One of the first references to the uneven placement of the bars was in a French textbook, *Manuel d' Education Physique et Morale*, in the 1830s. The textbook explains that in order for women to practice successfully between two bars, one of them needed to be moved to a lower height. The change was made, resulting in the now common uneven parallel bars.

The event made its debut at the 1934 World Championships in Budapest, Hungary, but it did not become an official Olympic sport until the 1952 Helsinki Games. During this time, the bars were placed very close together, and women would often simultaneously come into contact with both the high and low bar. (For example, a gymnast would wrap the lower half of their body around the low bar while holding onto the top bar at the same time.)

Today, the uneven parallel bars are set approximately 4 feet, 11 inches apart from one another with a plus/minus adjustment capability. This significant distance between the bars has made it possible for gymnasts to perform complex release moves including giant swings, flips and twists.

In the 1970s, the event began to change as companies started manufacturing the women's uneven bars separately from the men's parallel bars. The new uneven parallel bars were adjustable and used tension cables to stay rooted to the floor. The manufacturers also decreased the circumference of the bars, making it easier to grip.

As a result of these changes, throughout the 1970s and 80s, the bars continued to get further apart and gymnasts started performing more and more complex release moves.

The difficulty of the releases increased with each additional separation between the bars. This continual progression makes many of the tricks performed before the 1980s obsolete in contemporary artistic gymnastics.

Routine Requirements in Practice

A gymnast who competes at level seven and above must complete a bars routine that is designed by her and her coach. There are seven different categories of movements that a gymnast must incorporate within the routine:

1. **Dismounts:** The way the gymnast exits the bars onto the mat.
2. **Elementary skills:** These skills include moves such as handstands, kip, and hip circles.
3. **Giants:** A complete rotation around the bars in a handstand.
4. **Mounts:** The way a gymnast initiates her bar routine.
5. **Release moves:** A move where the gymnast releases her hands from the bar, performs a trick in the air, and re-grasps the bar.
6. **Stalders:** Swinging around the bar in a pike or straddle body position from one handstand to another.
7. **Transitions:** A movement of the hands/body from the low bar to the high and the high bar to the low.

A routine must last between 20 to 90-seconds, and in addition to the above skills, two separate transitions are required: one from the high bar to the low bar and one from the low bar to the high bar.

Each skill is ranked in difficulty from “A” easiest (hip circle) to “D/E” hardest (Pak Salto). Gymnasts can link skills together to increase the difficulty of the routine and get a higher start value, thereby greatly increasing the chances of receiving a high score.

Evaluation

The judges look for good form within a routine, including tight legs and pointed toes, proper handstand positioning and flow of movement. In addition, they want to see the inclusion of all required elements, correct execution, and a solid dismount that has distance, height and a stuck landing.

Judges no longer use the 1-10 scale to score artistic gymnastics routines. In the new system, a solid bar routine will score in the mid to high 16 range.

Here is how the scoring is currently done:

Difficulty

Each element in a routine has a point value based on its difficulty, starting at zero and increasing by one-tenth for each subsequent level. Therefore, an “A” level skill is given a point value of one-tenth whereas an “E” level skill has a point value of eight-tenths.

Scoring

The execution of a routine is judged beginning at 10 points with each error resulting in a point deduction. For example, a fall off the bar is an automatic five-tenths deduction.

Physical Skills

The uneven parallel bars require swing, timing, and endurance. A gymnast’s routine must be in constant motion as she swings from bar to bar, changes directions, and performs release moves. A gymnast must learn to trust that she can let go of the bar, do a move (often several feet in the air), and be able to grasp the bar again. There are a lot of diverse skills to be mastered for one event.

Mental Skills

On bars gymnast needs a moderate amount of physical and mental energy to maintain her swing. She must learn to focus and concentrate to do a variety of moves in the right position to regrasp the bar. She needs to manage possible fear as she flies high in the air between and above the bars.

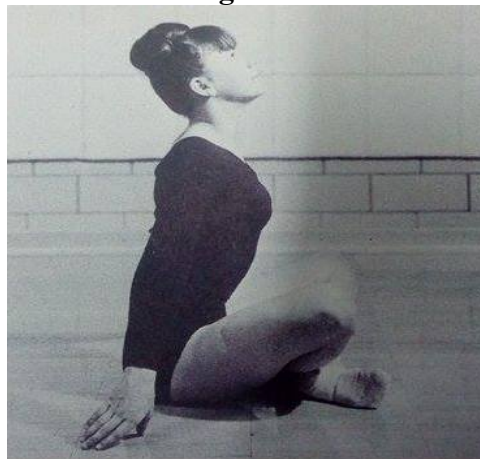
Warm Up Exercise

Proper warm ups are essential for any sport. The following exercise are to be used before the actual the apparatus is worked. These exercises are helpful in orienting the new student to gymnastics and should not be over looked. As they are performed, one should keep in mind the softness in the chapter on “ballet exercises for the Gymnast”. These exercises are not meant to be as demanding as the ballet exercises but are intended to be used as an introduction to the technique of gymnastic movements.

It is advisable to consider this a teaching unit within a unit. Take time to correct head and arm placement, body positioning as well as toe points and over all form here, as it will prove very valuable later in the unit. These exercises may be in a typical physical education class as a preparation for the “ballet exercises.”

Body Roll (figure 1)

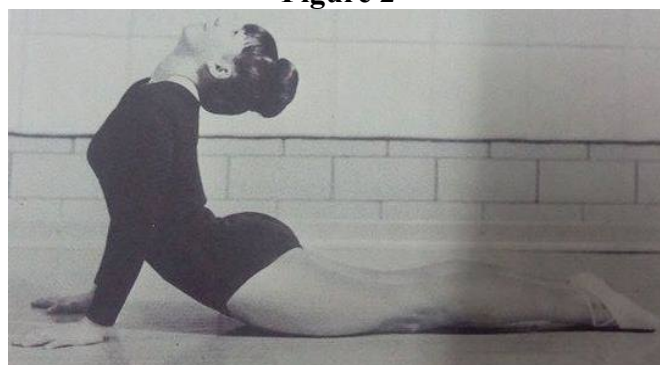
Figure 1



Sit tailor style. Hands are on the floor at sides. Thrust the torso forward from the waist, rolling the torso from the hips until the head touches the floor. (Do not let the buttocks leave the floor.) With the same rolling motion, return to a sitting position. The head is the last part to touch the floor and the last part to leave the floor.

One-hand Arch (figure 2)

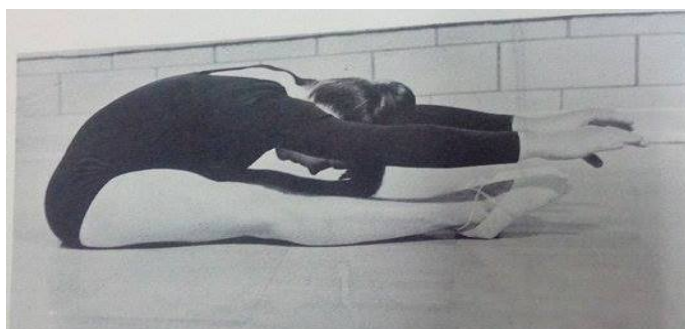
Figure 2



Lie on stomach, feet slightly apart, legs straight, palms on the floor beside the chest. Straighten the arms, arching the torso and the head backward. Hold and lower to the starting position. Legs remain on the floor throughout the exercise.

Toe Touch (figure 3)

Figure 3



Begin in a sitting position, legs together and extended forward, toes pointed, and knees straight. Keep the back straight, head up, and arms held sideward, slightly below shoulder level. Bend from the hips, touching the toes. (Do not bend the back, but keep it as flat as possible.) The arms move from the sides directly forward and then return to the torso back to the starting position.

Straddle Sit (figure 4)

Figure 4



Sit on floor, legs straddled, back straight, arms held sideward, slightly below shoulder level. Bend at hips, placing the trunk along the right leg with a small bounce, arms stretched horizontally forward over the toes. Return to starting position and hold one count before repeating the above to the left. Exercise is then done toward the centre twice.

Straddle Sit with Arm circles (figure 5)

Figure 5



Sit on floor, legs straddled, back straight, arms held sideward. Bend at hips, placing the trunk along one leg with a small bounce, arms stretched horizontally forward over toes. Return to starting position and repeat on other side. Return to sitting position and circle arms downward and upward completing one and one-half circle, finishing with arms over head, and immediately bend at hips and stretch body parallel to the floor. Place hands on ankles, arms straight. (Do not bounce here.)

Hurdle (figure 6)

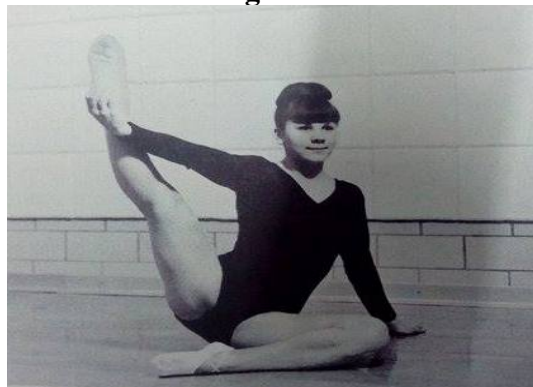
Figure 6



Sit on the floor with one leg straight forward and the other bent at a 90 degree angle (hurdle position). Bend at hips, placing trunk along forward leg. Bounce twice and return to sitting position. Execute three times and change position by bringing bent leg forward to join straight leg and then placing the straight leg in the hurdle position, other side.

Limber Check up (figure 7)

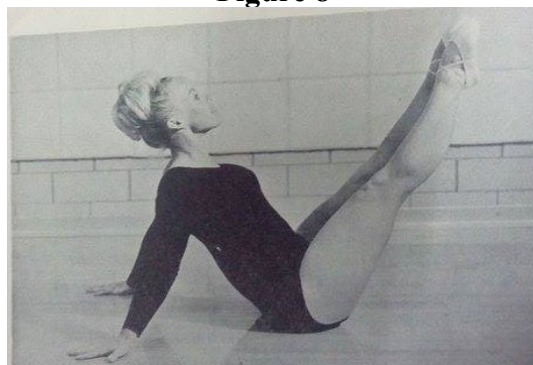
Figure 7



Sit on floor with legs crossed (Indian style). Grasp arch of the left foot with the left hand. Place the right hand on floor for support, slightly behind body. Raise left into the air until knee is straight. (Pull back-ward toward left shoulder, keeping the knee straight.) Lower leg to starting position. Repeat with the other leg.

V Seat (figure 8)

Figure 8



Sit on floor, legs extended forward and together. Place hands on floor, slightly behind the body for support (figure pointing away from body). The torso is now at a slight angle backward. Bend the knees, bringing feet as close to the buttocks as possible, then lift them into the air forming a "V" shape with the body. Keep toes pointed and then to the starting position.

Little Jumps (figure 9)

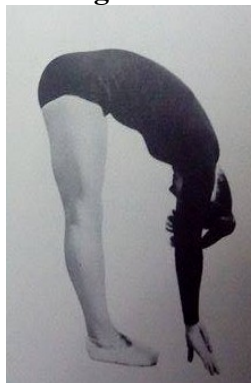
Figure 9



Begin in a standing position, feet together, arms held sideward, slightly below shoulder level. Spring into the air, pointing the toes when they are in the air. Land with flexed knees so as to immediately spring back into the air. This may be done any number of times with a rest when you think it necessary.

Raggedy Ann (figure 10)

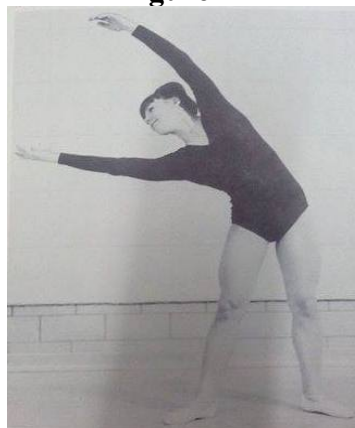
Figure 10



Begin in a standing position, arms at side. Collapse forward from waist, keeping legs straight. Perform four small bounces. Return to standing by bringing arms straight overhead, reaching for the ceiling lower arms sideward.

Torso Circles (figure 11)

Figure 11



Stand in a straddle position, arms overhead. Begin bending at waist to the left, continue making a large circle with arms and torso so as to bend sideward, forward, and sideward up to the original position. Legs remain straight throughout the exercise.

Big back flex (figure 12)

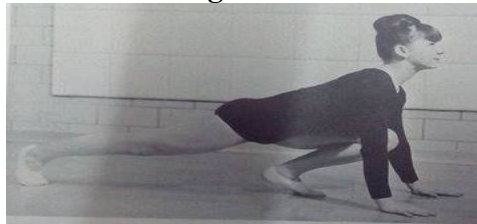
Figure 12



From a standing position, feet slightly apart, arms overhead, bend knees and at same time bend trunk forward, swinging arms forward downward, and backward, bringing head close to the knees (body wave) immediately straighten knees and body to original standing position but continue to the rear, bringing relaxed arms overhead with back slightly arched.

Grasshopper (figure 13)

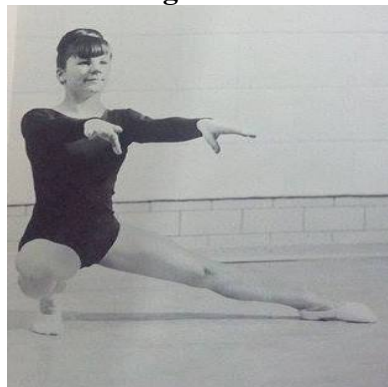
Figure 13



From a deep lunge, weight slightly forward on arms, head up and rear foot turned under, bounce four times. On the fourth bounce jump so as to land in starting position on other side. Repeat.

Lunge to the Side (figure 14)

Figure 14



Begin in a standing position, feet together, arms at sides. Step with right foot directly to the side (arms move up to shoulder level). Immediately bend right knee so as to assume a deep lunge position. Left leg is straight. Return to standing by pushing off on right foot and bringing it to join the left foot.

Knee Grind

Sit on floor with knees to one side, arms obliquely downward to opposite side. Swing arms so as to bring them horizontally forward and at the same time rise up on knees. (Knees should be slightly apart.) Return to starting on opposite side.

Relax to the side

From a standing position, feet slightly apart, step to the side, placing weight on a bent leg. Let the body follow the leg and relax over knee, head and shoulder relaxed forward. Return to original position and repeat on the other side. Arms remain at sides.

Changing arm wheel

From a standing position, feet slightly apart, arms held to one side, swing arms downward and upward in front of the body as to complete one and one-half circle, at the same time flexing the knees and thrusting the hips forward. After the first one and one-half circle, at the same time flexing the knees and thrusting the hips forward. After the first one and one-half circle, repeat exercise bringing arms downward and upward one and one-half circle.

Dance me loose

From a standing position, feet slightly apart, arms horizontally forward, swing arms downward and back so as to make two complete circles. At the same time, flex the knees as arms rise backward and upward. Immediately after the second circle, bend knees and at same time bend trunk forward, swinging arms forward, downward, and backward so as to bring head into knees and immediately straighten knees and body to original standing position.

Knee pull

Stand with one foot in front, carrying the weight and the other pointed behind. Swing the back leg forward, backward, forward and bend at knee. Secure hands around knee and pull leg into chest. Stand on his foot and repeat on other side.

Row Boat

Face partner in a sitting position, knees against chest. As partner one leans back to touch back and shoulder on the floor, partner two leans forward opening knees. Both partners keep a firm hand grip all the time. It is of some help if partner one puts one foot on top of opposite foot of partner, and partners two does same.

Pump

Sitting back to back, knees bent, knees bent against chest, arms inter-locked, slowly straighten knees until you are in a standing position, then return slowly to a sitting position. This exercise can be done without the use of inter-locked arms.

Arm Fling

Partners sit facing each in a straddle position, right hands gripped. Fling left arm from front to a position obliquely and to the rear. Return to starting position and repeat on other side.

Partner skipping

Partners stand side by side, feet slightly apart, inner hands joined, other arm relaxed at side, starting with the inside foot, execute four step hops, then immediately face partner and join both hands, shoulder height, and execute four step hops with raised leg sideways.

Sway Bridge

Partners stand facing each other, feet straddled. Lean forward, from hips, and place hands on partners' shoulders, arms straight, back flat. Bounce for eight counts, keeping head well up. Then relax by releasing hands and drooping forward for the next eight counts. Repeat exercise.

Summary

In recent years, the bars have been the source of increased criticism. The new scoring system allows gymnasts to increase their starting value by stringing together difficult movements. As a result, routines have become more risky and more dangerous, raising concerns among many in the gymnastics community.

Nevertheless, the significant changes that have occurred in the uneven parallel bars event over the last 50 years have contributed greatly to the sport of gymnastics. The evolution of the bars continues to test even the most powerful gymnasts and has made the event a more dazzling combination of strength, acrobatics and beauty.