**Gymnastics Meets – What To Expect**

 It’s September and you’ve just been told your son has made the team. The coach then hands you a stack of papers covering practice schedules, meet schedules, uniforms, and more fundraising opportunities than you ever knew existed. Sorry, can’t help with the fundraising, but we can take some of the mystery out of what exactly a gymnastics meet entails. This guide will take you through the whole process from reading the schedule, to preparing for your first meet, to what to expect when you get there.

**Before the Season Starts:**

* **Uniform** – One of the first things the gym will do, likely in September, is to have your son fitted for his uniform. Most competition uniforms are special order and require a long lead time for delivery. Boys’ competitive uniforms consist of a competition shirt or singlet, shorts, pommel pants and socks, as well as a warm-up and gear bag. Boys compete floor exercise and vault in shorts and the remaining four events in pommel pants and socks.
* **Schedule** – When you receive your schedule in the fall, it will list the season’s meets, along with dates and registration fees. The date will generally cover a 2-3 day time span, usually a Sat-Sun or a Fri-Sun. Don’t worry, your son will not be competing the entire weekend. Meets are broken into multiple sessions by level. As the date for the meet approaches and the meet director finalizes his competitor list, he will publish the meet schedule with session times. For example, Level 4’s may be scheduled to compete in Session 2, to be held Saturday from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
* **Sessions** - A meet may be broken into 3 to 4 sessions per day depending on the size. For extremely large groups, (often Levels 4 and 5), the levels will further be broken down into age groups. Level 4 6-year-olds may compete in one session and 7-8-year-olds in another. A session will normally take 2 ½ - 3 hours.
* **Hotels** – Because there are fewer boys’ teams than girls’, there tend to be fewer meets, but those meets there are, tend to be large invitationals with teams coming from all over the region, as well as other parts of the country. If you have to travel for a meet, make hotel arrangements early. Meet directors often have a discounted block of rooms set aside at a host hotel, but they fill quickly. Whether at the host hotel, or elsewhere, book your room for the entire duration of the scheduled meet. Once session times are announced, you can cancel the nights you don’t need. If you wait until session times are announced, you may not be able to find a room.

	+ **Tip** – If you didn’t book a room early, be on your toes the day or two following the session time announcements. That’s when everyone else is cancelling the nights they don’t need and you may be able to slide into the host hotel block of rooms then.

**Before the First Meet:**

* **Session Times Posted** – Session postings will likely look similar to this:

**Session III – Saturday Day -** Modified Capitol Cup (Warm-up/compete)

Boys – Levels 5 & 7

12:00 – Check-In

12:30 – Open stretch in Downstairs Gym

12:55 – Coaches Meeting @ Head Score Table

 1:00 – March –In

 1:10 – Timed Warm-Ups begin with competition following immediately

 3:30 - Awards

Your son’s coach will make sure you know what time to have him there. The schedule may or may not have check-in or registration times posted. If not, be sure to have your son there at least 15 minutes prior to open stretch. Open stretch is the time the boys are allowed out on the competition floor to begin warming up and stretching. For relatives or friends who are planning to come watch, have them arrive by March-In time. This is when the boys march into the gym, team introductions are made, and the National Anthem is played.

* **Getting Dressed –** Coaches will usually have boys arrive at the meet in uniform. If the uniform top is a singlet, either shorts or pommel pants are okay for arrival, with warm-ups over top. With the singlet, there is no issue with changing back and forth from shorts to pommel pants.

If the uniform top is a compression shirt, however, the boys should have BOTH shorts AND pommel pants on under their warm-ups. Why? Unlike girls’ gymnastics, boys require several wardrobe changes as the meet progresses. If your son starts on rings, he will be in pommel pants. His next event is then vault. There is no going to the bathroom to change. He needs to drop the pommel pants at his seat to be prepared to vault in shorts. If he is wearing a compression shirt and he drops his pommel pants and his shorts aren’t already underneath………….

Which brings me to a related topic. NO BOXERS. Many boys routinely wear boxer shorts or boxer briefs. Men’s gymnastic shorts do not come to the knees, not even close. Don’t let your son go to a meet and have to worry about whether his SpongeBob boxers are hanging out the bottom of his shorts. He has enough to worry about.
* **Packing the Gym Bag –** So you’ve got him dressed, and he’s wearing every piece of his uniform, so what’s he need a bag for? Several things actually. He needs a place to crumple his warm-ups into a ball and shove them while he is competing. You think I’m kidding? Just wait. As your son moves from event to event, he will carry his bag with all his gear with him. What else goes in the bag? A water bottle, healthy snack like grapes or pretzels. Absolutely no chocolate. Extra socks. Remember those multiple wardrobe changes? He WILL lose a sock somewhere along the way.

**Arriving At the Meet:**

* **Drop-Off** – Upon arrival, you will need to check your gymnast in at the registration table or gymnast check-in area. He will be verified on the meet roster and have his number written on his hand. Your gymnast can then link up with his coach and make his way into the meet area. This is the last time you will have contact with him until the awards ceremony. You then proceed to the seating area, usually by way of the paid admissions counter. Expect to find admission fees in the $5-$10 range.
* **What to Bring** – Cash for entry fees, programs, concessions, t-shirts, candy grams, etc.

Camera – absolutely, positively NO flash photograpy!!!
 Stadium seat – those bleacher seats get really hard after a while

* **Goodies** – Depending on the size of the meet, there may be various concessions available. Snack sales are usually present. Larger meets may have t-shirt concessions, or meet programs for sale. You’ll also often see candy-grams of some sort. Candy grams are small goodies or trinkets that you can purchase for a few dollars that includes a note of encouragement or congratulations to your gymnast. These are presented at the beginning of the awards ceremony while the meet director is trying to sort out the order of awards.

**The Actual Meet:**

* **Warm-Ups** – Open stretch is done and the teams have marched in and been introduced. Now event warm-ups begin. Meets will generally follow one of two formats: traditional or capital cup. (Sometimes you will see them listed as Modified Traditional or Modified Capital; this has to do with the number of sets of equipment available). The meet format will usually be published on the meet schedule published by the host gym.

Traditional meets warm up all 6 events prior to competition. Once actual competition begins, there are no more warm-ups or practice runs.

In a Capital Cup format, gymnasts will warm-up their first event. They will then compete that event. Then all gymnasts will rotate to their second event, warm-up, then compete, etc. Capital Cup has become a more common format, but your son will likely compete in some traditional format meets as well.

* **Order of Events** – Events will follow Olympic order: floor exercise, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars and high bar. That doesn’t mean everyone starts on floor exercise. Whatever event he starts on, he will continue through to the end of the order and then go to the first event in the order. For example, if he starts on p-bars, he will then go to high bar, then floor, pommel, etc.
* **Cheering** – Nope this isn’t golf; no one will be holding up a Silence Please sign before each routine. It’s also not a European soccer match with riots in the street. Cheering is encouraged and appreciated, but remember to be respectful. Men’s gymnastics is a relatively small sport. You will see the same competitors, coaches and judges throughout the season, so please, no heckling the other teams or judges. Your actions represent your gym just as much as your son’s. Gymnastics is also a very friendly sport. You will see complete strangers cheering for your son when he does something well. Parents in the stands know the long hours and dedication required to compete in the sport of gymnastics. Let the applause be a reflection of your appreciation of all that hard work, whether it’s your son or someone else’s. So cheer away, and let them know how proud you are of them.
* **Contact** – There is no contact with your gymnast once you turn him over to the coach for open stretch. No talking to him from the stands. And absolutely, positively NO texting him on a cell phone he has hidden in his gym bag. Let the coaches do what they need to do and let your son focus on what he needs to do. No cell phones or video games in the gym bag at all.
* **Scoring** – Do you have a degree in math, majoring in decimals? If so, you’ll love the scoring primer located on the Va Men’s Gymnastics site. If not, suffice it to say that 10.0 is no longer the perfect score. Depending on your son’s level, the maximum score he can achieve may be an 11.7, or a 12.7 or a 15.9, depending on a number of factors.
* **Awards** – Award ceremonies are held immediately following each session. There are individual awards and team awards. During the awards, you may use flash photography.

Individual awards are given in each event, and the All-Around, broken out by age group and level. While not a rule, awards are usually given to the top half of the age group, i.e. if there are 16 competitors at level 4, age 6-7, awards will be given to the top 8 in each event. The All-Around score is the sum of the scores for all 6 events.

Team awards are given by level. The top 3 individual scores on each event, regardless of age group, are added together to give a team score. Highest team score wins the team award. You may hear your son come home and say he was a “contributor” on p-bars. That means he had one of the top 3 scores for his level on p-bars, and his score contributed to the team score.

**Headed Home:**

* Congratulations. You’ve made it through the first meet. You’ll be a pro before you know it.
* **A Final Word** – Gymnastics is HARD. The car ride home is not the time to review the game film and critique performance. Keep things in perspective…..chances are, you have an elementary aged child who just went out on a floor in front of hundreds of complete strangers and did things that we would be in traction for a month for even attempting. Some things probably didn’t go the way he hoped they would. He and the coach already know what went wrong, so leave that discussion to the coaches. Your job is to be head cheerleader, support system, chauffeur and after meet treat getter. So go get that treat. See you at the next meet.