



What You Should Know Before

Enrolling With Any Gym

Presented by:



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Even people who have used gyms in the past find that, on the surface, they all seem pretty much the same.

That is until you've signed up and paid your money. Only then do you discover that some things fall far below expectations.

Whether you're enrolling yourself or your child you need to ask them the right questions and know exactly what answers should come back. This guide gives all the Q&A you need to make sure you can expect fair treatment, skilled coaching, proper student to coach ratios and the utmost in safety precautions.

Read it and avoid disappointment.

1 What If You're Not Happy? Is There A Money-Back Guarantee?

If you are joining a gym as a first time member, you would be reasonable to expect a four week "grace period" to give you plenty of time to experience the program and coaching style to see if it works for you. You should be entitled to change classes or receive a full refund for the classes you haven't taken. If the gym is confident in



their ability to please you, they should accommodate your request with only minor administration fees. In fact, it should be a routine **policy posted on their web site** rather than a “special exception for you.”

2 General Appearance;

Most people naturally gravitate toward a facility that’s bright, clean and cheerful. It makes for a pleasant training environment. But what about what you don’t see? It’s hard enough for kids to keep from getting germs while attending school so All Star’s cleaning staff has been armed with disinfectant spray to apply to all contact points daily. Bathrooms, faucets and door handles all get the treatment. The gyms are disinfected every week and all carpets inside and outside the gym are vacuumed regularly. Many gyms are cleaned once a month only by volunteers instead of trained staff. This is just not adequate when thousands of children pass through the doors each month.

Look from floor to ceiling and see if it in a general state of disrepair. Are wash-rooms clean? Is there enough parking? This will tell you how much they care.

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It may lack safety features.

3 What Steps Are Taken To Ensure Safety?

In any sport there is risk of injury. Risk can only be minimized with the right equipment and knowledge. Unfortunately not all gyms are prepared to make the investment in either.

Ask, “What steps are taken to ensure safety?” And don’t accept a “wishy-washy” answer – ask about their equipment and training. When it comes to equipment, no gym should compromise with home-made apparatus. Because gym equipment is not regulated some gyms make their own to cut costs. It will be non-standardized and may lack safety features. Look for thick matting around the equipment with no gaps at all.

Ask if they have a “spring floor”. It’s an advancement in gymnastics flooring using a Russian Birch wood floor mounted on springs to absorb shock and enhance spring. Many clubs have a ‘cube’ sprung floor - a lower cost alternative to the one used by All Star. Cube foam sacrifices performance and can increase the chance of

injuries. All Star uses the top of the line Spieth-Anderson top spring floor with Palmer Power Springs.

If the gym doesn't use a "Fast Track" trampoline manufactured by Tumb-Trak you are taking unnecessary risk. This model has a high tension trampoline bed requiring half the travel distance for the same spring action. This allows it to be mounted only 2 feet from the floor. Some gyms have older versions that are 4 feet high, have less padding and due to the extra height the result is harder falls.



When new coaches are hired at All Star, they "shadow coach" experienced, qualified coaches for at least two weeks. They receive thorough in-house training covering safety practices, procedures and teaching principles. They are also required to take annual "risk management" courses to enhance their knowledge of injury prevention. Course content focuses on reducing risk of injury through proper gym layout, procedures, class management and effective supervision. They are better equipped to identify potential hazards and apply proper coaching and supervision techniques. In addition to hosting annual in-house clinics for their own staff, All Star hosts NCCP courses on behalf of Gymnastics Ontario in their own facility. This certifies coaches from all over the province in the Artistic Gymnastics and Trampoline disciplines for the Sport of Gymnastics.

If you are enrolling small children look for specialized Kindergym equipment sized for small hands and short bodies. The pre-school gym area should be segregated from the athletes' gym to maximize safety for all participants. Even experienced gymnasts are at risk if preschoolers wander around unaware of athletes vaulting, tumbling and dismounting from appara-

tus. Furthermore, a separate preschool gym reduces the anxiety that young children may experience from all the activity in a big gym with larger children.

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4 What Are The Coaches Credentials? (And May I See Their Certificates?)

Look for a facility with coaches that have the technical knowledge and take great pleasure in teaching the sport. To make sure coaches have proper accreditation ask to see a valid NCCP (National Coaching Certification Program) certificate. As a minimum it should be Level 1. Although coaching certificates are a mandatory industry requirement, some gyms disregard it. This was revealed when coaches employed at a local gym applied for employment with All Star Sports Centre without proper certification. Naturally, without proper certificates they were not eligible for employment at All Star. All of the coaches at All Star have the required certifications. They are kept on file for anyone to see. In fact 82% have Level 2 or higher.

Some of the noteworthy coaches at All Star include: **Tatiana Frolova** from the Russian Gold Medal World Championship Team (level 2 certified) and **Nelu Toma**, a Romanian National Gymnast and graduate of the Romanian National Gymnastics School who is level 3 certified.

At All Star, the requirement for coaching athletes for artistic gymnastics and trampoline is NCCP Level 1 certification. Coaches teaching the competitive program must have Level 2 or higher and Level 3 certification is required to train gymnasts for National level competitive gymnastics. In addition to obtaining required certification, coaches are evaluated for their ability to inspire children and encourage them through positive reinforcement. This can only be evaluated through observation over time and through feedback from students. For that reason all coaches are hired on 3-month trial basis before they are considered permanent employees.



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5 Can Ambitious Athletes Be Challenged Without Joining The Competitive Program?

Some students have great abilities and demand a more disciplined curriculum but don't really want to go competitive. Not all gyms have a spot for those people. At All Star, there are programs specifically designed for them called "Advanced Gym" and "GymStars." Advanced Gym gives talented athletes the option of participating in advanced style classes with higher expectations, greater attention to detail on skill development and technique with a more progressive approach toward recreational gymnastics.

Gym Stars is a recreational program for students that are advanced, but aren't competitive athletes. They train two or three times a week totaling as much as six hours. Each year they can participate in two in-house competitions to give them the "real gymnast" experience. Its complete with uniforms, official judges and awards. This way the athletes are working toward personal goals for the competition instead of just moving to the next number in a grading system.

6 Even If You Want Recreational Gymnastics Ask About Their Competitive Program

The level of achievement of their competitive team gives you an indication of the coaches' technical abilities so ask which awards the competitive athletes have achieved recently (about the last 3 years). All Star athletes have performed very well, having gained three Provincial champions, and two Eastern Canadian champions. If you are looking for a competitive program find one that is relatively small, with no more than 50 or 60 athletes enrolled. This increases the chance that there will be adequate resources to properly train you.



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7 What Is The Business Structure Behind The Gym?

Many local gyms are non-profit, whereas All Star is a private organization. They don't have the red tape, politics, or a board of governors that can be detrimental to the athletes in many respects. They cater to the needs of both students and parents, providing everything they'll ever need - equipment, training, a Cafe and Gym Shop. For the benefit of the athletes they hire career staff - people who coach for a living. Observe how you are treated as a prospective member when you ask questions. Do the answers flow freely from a well trained employee or is it a volunteer who needs to check and get back to you? All Star members know when they call they will speak with someone who is knowledgeable, caring, and empowered to make decisions.



8 How To Evaluate Coaches And Class Size

To evaluate a coach's style, ask to sit in on a class as an observer. Effective coaching skills take years to develop. Although we encourage bringing junior coaches up through the ranks it would be a disservice to the athletes if they were trained almost exclusively by younger, inexperienced coaches. Have a keen eye for the ages of the coaches.

Examine their ability to inspire children through positive reinforcement. Observe what the class ratio is. A class of 8:1 is appropriate for children aged 4 and up, while 6:1 is best for children 3 years of age and 4:1 for children 2 years old on their own.

Top gyms attract top coaching talent. Ask if there are any World Champion Gold Medalists on staff. Do they have choreographers that are former high-level gymnasts? In fact you might even ask if the owner is involved in coaching too. This will tell you if they're in business for passion or profit.

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9 What Recognition Programs Do They Have?

Everybody loves a pat on the back for a job well done. Its positive reinforcement that builds self esteem and keeps athletes focused on achieving more. If their only recognition is the next "level certificate," the road to success can feel long and hard.

All Star's recognition programs acknowledge not only the major milestones, but all the little steps along the way. Even the mastery of a single new skill receives attention. When a gymnast performs a new skill they are encouraged to ring the bell. All gymnasts and coaches stop to watch the skill and everyone applauds effort and performance. There are many other recognition programs such as the "Wall of All Stars" to recognize the accomplishments of kids in every program. There are "Star Achievements" for progression toward new skills. There is regular testing twice a year where athletes are individually recognized with awards and certificates for their



achievements. To cap things off, All Star holds their annual "Gym Jam Week" to give participants the opportunity to exhibit their skills to an audience of family and friends.

10 For Parents Enrolling Kids In Day-Camp, Ask If They Guarantee Extended Hours

Some gyms have day camp schedules with extended hours to allow parents to drop children off earlier or pick them up later if needed. This can be a real convenience for parents who work outside the home. However, if the gym doesn't guarantee their extended hours because of low turnout, you may find yourself scrambling for a babysitter or leaving work early to pick up your child. Ask if the gym will stick to their commitment regardless of the number of kids enrolled in the program.



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11 Do They Have A Web Site Designed For Members?

While most gyms put up a marketing web site with photos and a list of services, All Star has recently invested heavily and launched a membership based site that features a members' area and online registration. Now from the comfort of your home you can set up an account, find out what's going on, choose your programs and pay online in just a few minutes. Other features include a calendar of events and member information centre and the ability to generate receipts and statements.

12 Your Membership Fee May Be Tax Deductible If Your Gym Provides The Right Paperwork

The "Children's Fitness Tax Credit" became effective on January 1, 2007 to encourage children's participation in programs that significantly contribute to their fitness. It is to help parents offset some of the costs

associated with fitness activities and eligible day camps.

The proper documentation is required to take advantage of the program. While many gyms would rather not deal with the paperwork, All Star has revised their invoicing system to include the required information and to allow members to download receipts directly from the web site at www.allstarsportscentre.com



13 Is the Gym Experiencing Growth?

Any gym that isn't growing may be on its way out of business. It could be they don't have enough selection, the coaching is sub-standard or customer service is poor. All Star Sports Centre opened its doors in 2002 as All Star Gymnastics. It has become the most successful gymnastics school in the Brampton area attracting over 700 members. By listening to their members' requests All Star added a variety of programs in addition to gymnastics. The new name, All Star Sports Centre, better describes the organization since it now offers cheerleading, fitness, sports team conditioning, gym parties and more.



14 Are They Accessible?

From time to time you may have questions and you'll want to speak with a person who can answer them and is empowered to make decisions. While most gyms prefer to use email or answering machines to return calls at their convenience, All Star's dedicated office staff is available to serve you when you call and the only time you'll get voice mail is when all the lines are in use.



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