

UNIFY ATHLETICS SUMMER NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2023



UNIFY
— ATHLETICS —

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Why Your Tots Should Do Gymnastics
- Overcoming Injury by Ani, Elizabeth and Zoe
- Inside Look at Camp Phoenix
- Back to School Bash
- Meet Coach Lainey!
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WHY YOUR TOTS SHOULD DO GYMNASTICS

So your 2 year old isn't likely going to the olympics in 2024, so why should they participate in a gymnastics class?

Gymnastics classes are an excellent way for toddlers to develop their physical abilities, social skills, and overall confidence. Here are just a few of the benefits of enrolling your child in gymnastics classes at a young age:



1. **Physical development:** Gymnastics involves a wide range of physical activities, including jumping, rolling, and tumbling. These movements help toddlers develop their motor skills, balance, coordination, and flexibility.
2. **Socialization:** Gymnastics classes offer an opportunity for toddlers to interact with other children their age and develop social skills such as taking turns, sharing, and following instructions.
3. **Confidence building:** As toddlers learn new skills and achieve their goals in gymnastics, they will develop a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence that will benefit them in all areas of their lives.
4. **Discipline:** Gymnastics classes often include structured routines and rules that help toddlers develop discipline and focus.
5. **Healthy habits:** Starting healthy habits early in life is crucial for lifelong health. Gymnastics encourages physical activity and can help toddlers develop a love for exercise that will carry into adulthood.

Overall, gymnastics classes are an excellent way for toddlers to have fun, develop physical and social skills, build confidence, and establish healthy habits. If you're considering enrolling your child in gymnastics, it's worth exploring the various classes and programs available in your area to find the best fit for your family.

In addition to the physical and social benefits of gymnastics, there is evidence to suggest that early physical activity can have a positive impact on neural development in toddlers. Research has shown that regular physical activity can increase the number of neural connections in the brain, leading to improved cognitive function and better learning outcomes. This is especially important during the early years of life when the brain is rapidly developing.

Gymnastics classes involve a variety of movements and activities that can help promote neural development in toddlers. For example, learning and practicing new skills can improve their ability to process and retain information, while balancing and coordination exercises can strengthen neural connections in the cerebellum, a part of the brain that plays a critical role in movement and learning.

By enrolling your toddler in gymnastics classes, you may be giving them a head start on developing the neural connections and cognitive skills they will need for success in school and beyond!

OVERCOMING INJURY: BY ANI, ELIZABETH AND ZOE

Injury is a difficult and unfortunate part of any sport. Three of our upper-level athletes (who also coach classes!) share their stories with injury - what happened? How did they recover? What were the challenges to their return to sport?

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ANI
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In the Fall of 2019 I injured my arm while doing a front handspring front tuck on the floor. I over rotated the front handspring and hit the wall with a straight arm. The impact caused an ole ran on fracture in my left elbow with my tricep being torn completely as well as two ligaments attached to the elbow. my tricep tendon being completely torn as well as two ligaments attached to the elbow.

Ya, I don't know what any of that means either, basically, when I hit the wall my tricep muscle pulled off a piece of the “pointy” part of my elbow and it hurt! Because of this, I had to have surgery and a looong road of recovery. After a few months of zero mobility in my arm I began my physical therapy journey. I had around two/three months of PT which focused solely on regaining basic everyday arm function.. I was then allowed to start doing more weight bearing exercises and return to gymnastics. Although I thought I would be thrilled and ready to get back to work immediately I quickly realized how scared I was...

I knew my arm was all fixed up but it still felt strange. It was never going to be the same as it was before I hurt it, even with months of PT I was never able to fully straighten my arm again or regain full sensation in my elbow. This was a hard realization for me and it's something I still deal with today. Coming back to gymnastics sucked, I love the sport with all of my heart but I knew I wouldn't be able to do certain things anymore. It meant changing skill paths and leaving behind certain skills that I loved like my front handsprings on vault and floor. My bent arm also led to “aesthetic” issues going forward. Gymnasts are supposed to have beautiful form, everything is flowy and graceful, every movement executed with purpose, not a single thing out of place (at least in theory). But now I felt insecure, even when I was standing sharp, my arm was bent, when I did skills or choreography, my arm was bent. I hated it because I felt like it stuck out like a sore thumb, it was a major setback for me. Getting back into the swing of things was a lot harder than I could have ever imagined. I kept wishing that I could just do everything my teammates were but I was busy relearning basic skills I had learned years ago. It was really difficult to stay motivated, especially as I saw all my friends competing, getting upgrades and doing exactly what made all of us fall in love with the sport in the first place



OVERCOMING INJURY: BY ANI, ELIZABETH AND ZOE (CONTINUED)

But I really did have the best coaches and teammates who kept pushing me forwards and never missed a beat in making me feel like I was still an equal part of the team. My coaches made conditioning lists to make sure I was staying on track strength wise to help me get back to gymnastics as smoothly as possible and although I HATED that conditioning (shout out to Vahid), I am so thankful I kept showing up and kept putting in the work because I would not have gotten this far without it. After injuring my arm my mom set a hard line, she told me that if I seriously injured myself again she was going to pull me out of gymnastics for good (it's hard being the fragile child). This led me to being terrified of doing almost anything in gymnastics, I didn't want to lose this huge part of me so I spent years being extremely cautious about everything. Even though this might have protected me from injury, it also meant I was holding myself back.

I wasn't being as powerful as I was before and I saw myself forming a lot more mental blocks, making it really difficult for me to progress in gymnastics because I constantly had a nagging voice in the back of my head reciting all the "what ifs" of possible

injury. But, as the years went on I started becoming more aware of my body and realized that being extra cautious isn't going to protect me from anything. If anything, it made me more susceptible to injury because it meant I wasn't putting 110% into every skill. I started working on becoming stronger physically and mentally, connecting my mind to my body and its movements. This allowed me to progress with less fear and put my mind at ease.

Now, in 2023, I am still a gymnast at the best gym EVER, and I'm better than ever. I'm about to wrap up my first competition season as a diamond and I'm pumped to start upgrading my skills for next year. Thank you for listening to my story <3



OVERCOMING INJURY: BY ANI, ELIZABETH AND ZOE (CONTINUED)

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Most people assume that gymnastics requires mainly physical strength; however, the truth is that the best gymnasts will be physically, mentally, and emotionally strong. Conditioning is very important to a gymnast's body because it allows us to use our muscles in the right way to be tight, sharp, and powerful, all while being graceful. It also protects our ligaments, tendons, and other body parts to try and prevent injury. But what does it mean to be mentally and emotionally strong?

If you take a step back and watch a gymnast's routines, you will realize that the skills they make look effortless, are actually quite scary. We spend hours working on drills, shaping, and doing skills over and over again so that we can master not only the muscle memory of the skill, but so that we can train our brains to let us do the crazy things we do. This is mental strength. During this process of learning how to perfect our skills and routines, it is inevitable that we will make mistakes. Sometimes we have bad form. Sometimes we fall. And sometimes we get injured. Gymnastics has one of the highest injury rates of girls' sports, so it is safe to say that we all experience an injury at least once during our gymnastics career whether it's rolling an ankle, or something as serious as breaking your back.

Being able to persevere through an injury is one of the most challenging things to go through as a gymnast. You watch your teammates progress, you long to swing on the bars or tumble on the floor, you feel no motivation, and you think you are going to get so far behind because everyone is progressing and you're not. To be able to deal with the physical pain of an injury is enough, but that added emotional stress is what makes the injury so much more difficult to deal with.

It takes great emotional strength to be able to be a gymnast because you are working with other people who also have

feelings, and so you must learn how to deal with your emotions, but also be able to help other people who are struggling with their own. This is one of the greatest gifts the sport has given me throughout my 11 years of gymnastics.



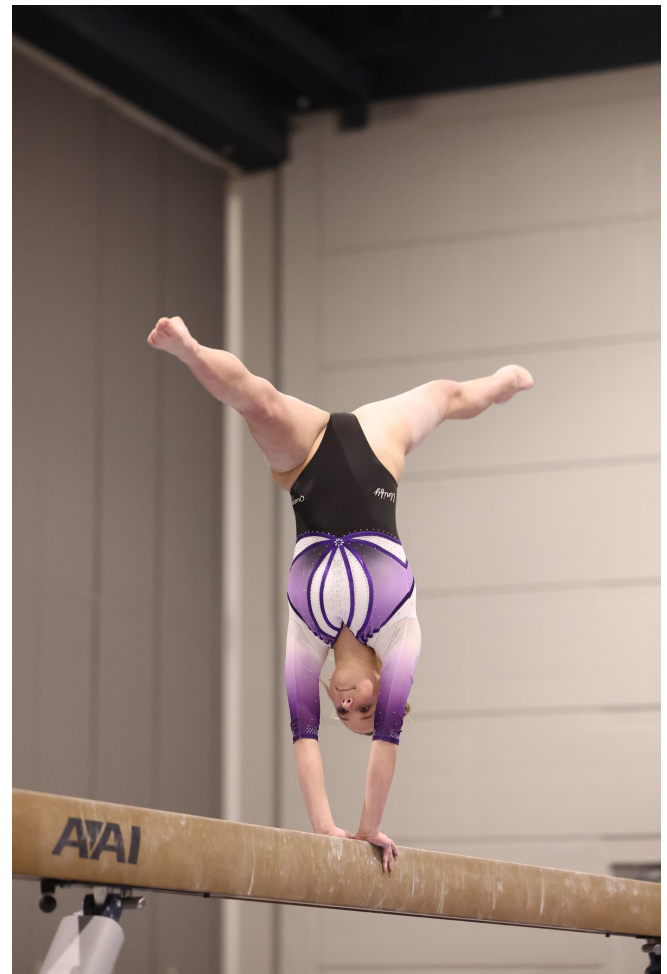
OVERCOMING INJURY: BY ANI, ELIZABETH AND ZOE (CONTINUED)

For the past five years, I have been dealing with a back injury. I broke two bones in my lumbar spine (lower spine). Physical therapists and doctors I visited told me that I would not be able to return to gymnastics because the risk was too high. They told me if I broke my back again, I would need surgery. This was devastating for me because gymnastics was my whole life, and I couldn't imagine what I would do without it. However, during the summer of 2022, I was telling Vahid how much I missed gymnastics, and he suggested that I come in for a practice and try out some basics to see if it hurt my back. So I tried it out, and to my surprise, I was able to do the basic skills without any pain. I had been doing physical therapy for about a year at that point, so I had really built up a lot of core strength that I could use during my skills rather than my spine. After talking with my coaches and parents, I decided to return to gymnastics. I am a bars and beam specialist, so that means I am able to focus on those two events more closely and hopefully be able to progress to higher levels. I am now training for level 9, which I am so excited for.

But it was not an easy path to get where I am today. I went through years of physical therapy so that I could heal my body and learn how to safely do gymnastics. That was definitely challenging for me because often PT exercises are difficult, but I find motivation in the fact that if I do my exercises, I can do gymnastics pain-free. The physical recovery, however, was not the most difficult part of recovering from my injury. The mental and emotional aspects of the recovery were the most challenging for me to overcome.

After returning, I realized that I lost a lot of emotional capacity to try new and scary things. While the muscle memory remained, my brain was a little confused why we were flipping, twisting, and swinging again. This led to some mental blocks that I have had to conquer, and even when it feels impossible, I know I can get through it because every day I am getting more and more mentally strong. As for emotional strength, it has been a little difficult for me because I have felt disconnected from my teammates for so long, but the more time I spend with them I recognize how thankful I am to have them.

Gymnastics is a sport that requires strength in all areas of the body and mind, and being able to learn how to recover from an injury and return to gymnastics requires one of the greatest strengths the brain will endure.



OVERCOMING INJURY: BY ANI, ELIZABETH AND ZOE (CONTINUED)

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ZOE

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I sprained my UCL (elbow ligament) in late January after falling from the high bar. This past winter was filled with a lot of physical therapy for me! Exercises have helped my arm to hinge, straighten, and eventually support weight. I am super grateful to be back to weight-bearing, but I am still unable to swing or hang without pain here in late March (tough as a bars lover!) It has been very discouraging to lose progress on upgrades and miss the majority of the season that I prepared so much for. I've had to adjust my mindset to embrace the progress I can make while being limited. Especially when I was in the splint/sling, I did a lot of cardio and explosive leg circuits to be ready to have productive vault rotations again.

I can't do bars like I usually can, but I can focus on handstand strength and stability, which will hopefully pay off when I get back to my bigger skills. Speaking of, I definitely have some fear about returning to bars. I'm anxious about losing

confidence, skills, and strength. I don't want to fall like I did again. I expect progress in regaining certain skills will be slow. Keeping my long term goals in mind-- skills like a giant half, an overshoot + Chinese sit-up combination, a double back dismount, a layout vault-- has been crucial for me as I've kind of trudged through conditioning and basics the last couple months, and I expect I'll need to stay future-focused as coming back to skills may be tedious and frustrating.

I feel so lucky to be surrounded by a supportive community that understands both physical and mental injury recovery! I'm so excited for what next season (senior season!) holds.



INSIDE LOOK AT CAMP PHOENIX

Check out what our phoenix campers have been up to so far this summer!



Check out these cuties representing Camp Phoenix in their tie dye shirts!

Camp Phoenix 2023 has had an amazing start to the summer! Not only is it a gymnastics camp, but campers will learn about physical, mental, and emotional well being through virtue lessons all while doing traditional camp activities such as arts and crafts, water day and nature time!



Water Day is a BLAST!!



Don't miss out on the fun!

There are still a few spots available!

STRONGER COMMUNITY
STRONGER ME
STRONGER FAMILY
STRONGER COMMUNITY
STRONGER ME
STRONGER FAMILY
STRONGER COMMUNITY

JULY 10-14
JULY 17-21
JULY 24-28
JULY 31- AUG 4
AUGUST 7-11
AUGUST 14-18
AUGUST 21-25

BACK TO SCHOOL BASH



Join us August 26th for our second annual Back to School Bash! This event is completely free and open to the entire community. There will be inflatables, face painting, food trucks and more!

SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE

Additionally, our competitive team will be putting together a School Supply Drive to collect supplies to give to local schools in the area. Be on the lookout for donation boxes in the gym starting in July!



SATURDAY AUGUST 26TH

MEET COACH LAINY

"I've been doing gymnastics since I was about six years old and when I joined the competitive team, I knew I wanted to stick with this sport. The bonds I have made are irreplaceable and I look forward to every practice at Unify. A few years ago, I tried shadowing a silver team and I found passion in coaching as well. Fostering a healthy mindset from the early stages of athletics is so important to me as a gymnast, and I'm so grateful that I get the opportunity to work with these kids and see how much joy gymnastics brings them!

Fun fact: I'm interested in sports medicine as a potential career field!"

We are so lucky to have coach Lainey here at Unify. It doesn't matter if she's on the floor as a coach or an athlete, she brings a fun energy and positivity to the gym every single day!



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We would like to invite individuals and businesses in our community opportunities to sponsor scholarships in our programs. Partnerships can be one-time contributions or ongoing contributions. They can be silent or we can partner with you to promote your business on our platform (email, monthly newsletter, socials, etc.).

To learn more, please contact us at hello@unify-athletics.com!
