

Gina Pongetti article for December newsletter: December article 2011

In the October and November newsletter articles, I addressed training concerns on the part of the athlete (October article) and on the part of the coach (November article). In this article, let's talk about training with various Tumbler Trak products and the injuries those products can help prevent.

**Forster Bar:** This is a great addition to a developmental program, and is also quite useful for higher levels. It teaches shifting, but also prevents bad habits from developing. From an injury perspective, low back pain is often caused by improper cast handstands and clear (free) hips, when the gymnast is not in good body position. The gymnast arches her back instead of using the core/spine/scapular muscles to work these skills. Using the Forster Bar increases wrist strength and control, and these are important because gymnastics is an upper extremity weight bearing sport. The more coordination between wrist/elbow and shoulder, the better the control in a handstand position, and the less stress on the rotator cuff muscles of the shoulder.

**Junior Sweet Spot:** This small, inflated mat is great for placing on top of springboard, and for distinct landings and take-offs for dance/tumble skills. It takes compressive forces and minimizes them, allowing less stress on the muscles, joints, and the body in general. While most think of this as a foot/lower extremity stress-relieving mechanism, I use it equally for the upper extremity. Examples of this are return from wrist injury, elbow, decreasing compressive forces on the spine in upper body weight bearing, and more. It is a great asset to vault-strapping it over the top to secure and allowing repetitive work on the prep (board to vault) and block phase of Yerchenko category vaults is key.

**Mini Trak:** This product is great for taking the forces of a springboard and diminishing them. It's good for working steps, approach, pre-flight and more. The Mini Trak helps prevent ankle injuries, knee stress in joint and patellar tendon, as well as stress on the low back.

**Air Floor:** This inflated mat is highly recommended. It gives added bounce and height when working new skills, and it builds confidence as well. Use of an Air Floor decreases stress in ankle, knee, hip and spine of the lower extremity. It takes pressure off of wrists, elbows and shoulders as well. Use of an Air Floor is key in rehab for OCD patients, addressing joint pain, and facilitating a quick return from fracture/sedentary time off. The Air Floor allows athletes to come back naturally, repeating skill sets of dance and tumbling *without* immediate introduction of stress to bones.

**Tumbler Trak:** I consider this a necessity for every gym. It allows athletes to complete higher reps of skills, landing in resi or foam pits or on mats. From a rehab perspective, a Tumbler Trak is important during return to sport after injury, because it allows the athlete to return to repetitive motion of spine, jumping with legs, and weight bearing on arms, *without* the shock to the bones that one gets when tumbling on spring floor or rod floor. Instead of learning tumbling skills on a hard floor into loose foam, a Tumbler Trak allows athletes to perform much higher numbers of prep skills, such as the round-off back handspring lead in, allowing the athlete to perform whatever skill comes after that. This way, the focus is on the *skill* and repetition, not on the fear of pounding/repetition before the end skill is even obtained.

I hope my series of articles has helped explain the purpose behind using equipment for injury prevention, joint saving, and practice regimen. Remember...quantity is not always better than quality, *and prevention always comes first!*

Happy flipping...and landing! Gina