WORLD OF WONDER
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GYMNASTICS

Performing gymnastics requires very high levels of fitness, skill and training.

Ancient Egyptian gymnast
1180 B.C.

Nadia Comăneci is Romanian. She is a five-time Olympic gold medalist.

In 1976, at the age of 14, Comăneci was the first gymnast to be awarded a perfect score of 10.0 at the Olympic Games.
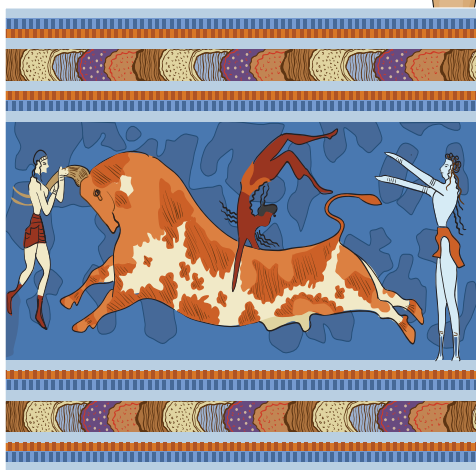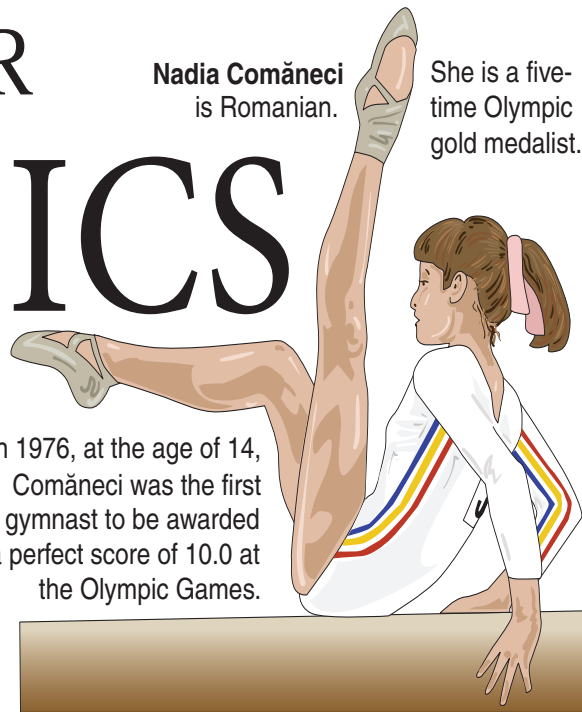
Ancient times

The art of ancient Egypt depicts the earliest known evidence of what looks like gymnastics. Seven thousand years ago, female acrobats performed gymnastic feats for pharaohs and the nobility.

About 2,500 years ago, the ancient Greeks of Athens used gymnastics as a form of training. Running, tumbling, weight-lifting, rope-climbing and swimming were used to promote physical and mental health. Many of the exercises once grouped under the umbrella of gymnastics are now seen as distinct sports.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, gymnastics vanished for hundreds of years.

American gymnast **Simone Biles**

Simone Biles holds the record for the most World Championship medals (25), as well as the most gold medals (19) in World Championship history for an athlete of either sex.

Biles won two medals at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics; a sillver in team and a bronze in balance beam.

Olga Korbut was Nicknamed the "Sparrow from Minsk."

Korbut won four gold medals and two silver medals at the Olympics (in 1972 and 1976) for the Soviet team.

A gymnast's score comes from deductions taken from their start value.

Bull-Leaping Fresco, *15th century B.C.* This fresco, from a wall at Knossos in Crete, shows three athletes leaping over a bull, reminiscent of modern vaulting.

Acrobatic gymnastics

Acrobatic gymnastics is sometimes called "acro." This discipline is performed by both men and women in groups of two, three or four athletes.

Many circus acrobats are former gymnasts.

Did you know?

Women's gymnastics focuses on artistry and agility, while men's gymnastics focuses on strength and power.

Gymnasts can no longer achieve a perfect 10. The scoring model was changed in 2006 with the introduction of the difficulty score.

Many professional gymnasts began practicing the sport as early as the age of 3. In general, female gymnasts achieve mastery between the ages of 14 and 18. Male gymnasts tend to master the sport in their late teens to early 20s.

The **leotard** that is worn by women in competitions is named after **Jules Leotard.** He was an acrobatic trapeze artist who wore the form-fitting costume during his performances in 1859.
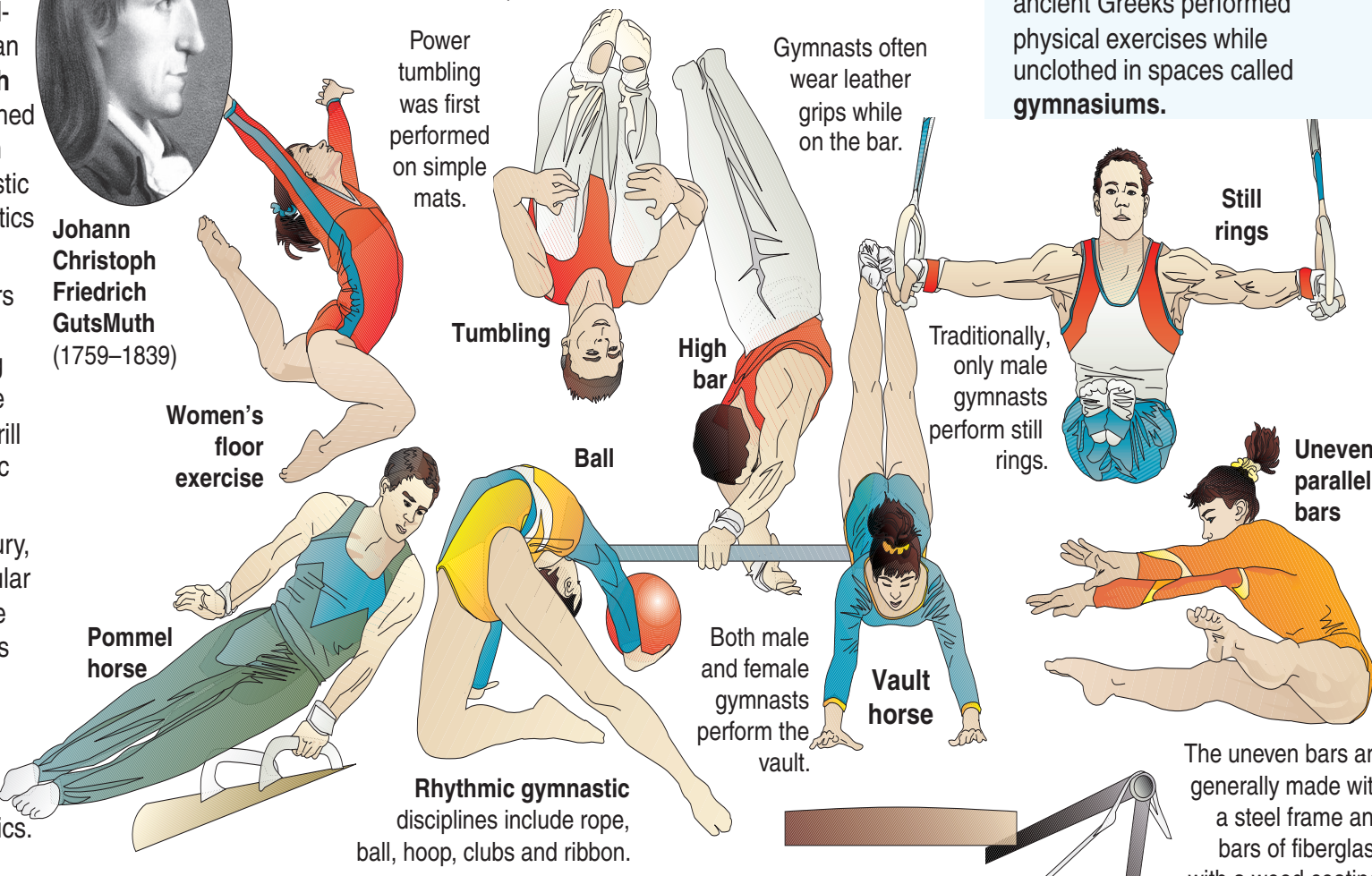
Variety is the spice of life

Artistic gymnastics is the sport's most popular discipline. It made its Olympic debut in 1896 at the first modern Games. Today, women artistic gymnasts compete for individual and team all-around titles in four events (vault, uneven bars, beam and floor), while male gymnasts compete in six events (floor, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars and horizontal bar).

In a word

The word **gymnastics** can trace its roots to the ancient Greek word *gymnazein,* meaning "to exercise naked." The ancient Greeks performed physical exercises while unclothed in spaces called **gymnasiums.**

Modern times

Sometimes called the grandfather of gymnastics, German educator **Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuth** published the first guide to the sport in 1793. It was called "Gymnastic für die Jugend," or "Gymnastics for Youth."

In the early 1800s, educators in the United States began to adopt gymnastics training programs. By the 1900s, the armed services published drill manuals featuring gymnastic exercises.

By the end of the 19th century, men's gymnastics was popular enough to be included in the first modern Olympic Games held in 1896.

The first women's Olympic gymnastic competition was held in the 1928. The event was synchronized calisthenics.

Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuth (1759–1839)

Power tumbling was first performed on simple mats.

Gymnasts often wear leather grips while on the bar.

Still rings

Tumbling

High bar

Women's floor exercise

Traditionally, only male gymnasts perform still rings.

Ball

Uneven parallel bars

Pommel horse

Both male and female gymnasts perform the vault.

Vault horse

The uneven bars are generally made with a steel frame and bars of fiberglass with a wood coating.

Rhythmic gymnastic disciplines include rope, ball, hoop, clubs and ribbon.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; https://www.britannica.com; https://en.wikipedia.org; https://www.collegesportsscholarships.com; https://www.smithsonianmag.com; https://kids.kiddle.co/Gymnastics