

# Handout #5 Gymnastics Champions

## Mary Lou Retton

Mary Lou Retton was born in Fairmont, West Virginia in 1968. At a young age, she realized that she needed more rigorous training if she wanted to become an Olympic champion. Studying under Bela Karolyi, the coach who had trained Retton's idol, Nadia Comaneci, she pursued the dream of becoming a gold medal gymnast. The hard work paid off when she became the first American to take home the gold in the women's all-around competition. In addition, she was also the first American woman to win an Olympic gold medal in gymnastics. She is the only woman to capture three American Cups and the only American to win Japan's Chunichi Cup, two U.S. Gymnastics Federation American Classics and the All-Around title at both the



- 1983 American Cup Champion
- 1983 American Classics Champion
- 1983 Chunichi Cup Champion
- 1984 American Cup Champion
- 1984 American Classics Champion
- 1984 U.S. Championships
- Gold Medalist & U.S. Champion:  
All-Around
- 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES
- Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion:  
All-Around
- Silver Medalist:  
Team
- Vault
- Bronze Medalist:  
- Uneven Bars
- Floor Exercise
- 1985 American Cup Champion
- 1985 Inducted into the USOC Olympic Hall of Fame
- 1987 Inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame

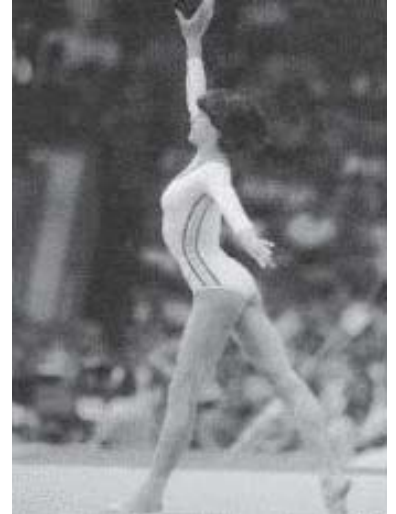
five | 1984 national  
sec: championships and  
all-t the Olympic trials.

Ma Retton's five-medal performance made her the  
ma darling of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. Her one  
en gold of the five was the big one — the all-around,  
S; which she clinched by scoring perfect 10s in the floor  
w exercise and vault. She won silvers in the team and  
} vault competitions, and bronze medals on the uneven  
bars and in the floor exercise. Retton's five Olympic  
medals place her in a tie for second place among all  
U.S. women on the all-time list. Mary Lou's historic  
Olympic performances, along with her radiant smile  
and enthusiasm, brought her recognition as Sports  
Illustrated Magazine's "Sportswoman of the Year" in  
1984. That same year, the Associated Press awarded

her the title "Amateur Athlete of the Year". In 1993, almost a decade after her Los Angeles triumph, an Associated Press national survey named her the "Most Popular Athlete in America."

# Nadia Comaneci

Born in Onesti, Romania, Nadia Comaneci started school in 1968, when she was six. Bela and Martha Karolyi (famed gymnastic trainers) were scouting potential talent for the Romanian National Junior Team, when Bela saw Nadia at her public school. Bela recounted, "I was visiting the kindergarten that day and I saw two little six-year-old girls playing in the courtyard during the recreation period. They were running and jumping around, pretending they were gymnasts. Then the bell rang. They both ran back inside and I lost them. I knew I would never leave that school until I found those two little girls. I went into each class looking for them. Finally, the third time around I found them."



Nadia was accepted into the new Gymnastics High School, and spent four hours a day in the gym and four and a half in the classroom.

When she was eight, Nadia was chosen to compete at the 1970 Romanian National Championships. In 1971, Nadia won the all-around title for her age group, and repeated it in 1972.



At only 14 years of age Nadia became the star of the 1976 Olympics in Montreal where she became the very first woman to score a perfect 10 (uneven bars) on her way to winning three Gold medals, one Silver and one Bronze. Her performance on the bars caught the imagination of the whole world. At times, during her routine, Nadia was virtually motionless, using unbelievable strength in her 86pound body to freeze herself above bars and beams in portraits of perfect gymnastic form. Then she would pick up the tempo and become a blur of arms and legs; like a ballerina in mid-air flight. At the most difficult points where others hesitated, Nadia became even bolder and more breath-taking. The crowd soared with her, gasping and cheering in a crescendo until she made her triumphant bow. Then there was the inevitable pause, followed by the new explosion of applause as her perfect 10 point score - unprecedented in Olympic gymnastics - was posted. Her performance earned her instant fame: she appeared on the covers of Time, Newsweek and Sports Illustrated, all in the same week. Nadia continued her dominance through the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. She defected to the USA in November of 1989. She has gone down in history as the mysterious, serious 14-year-old Romanian who wowed Olympic audiences in Montreal by earning seven perfect 10s in competition

Today, Nadia has mastered English and understands the mannerisms of the West a little better. Her husband, Bart Conner, himself a former Olympian, showed an interest in her shortly after her arrival in America. Their romance blossomed after being friends for years. They had known each other from competition previously and had personal respect for each others abilities.

Nadia speaks five languages and is active with the Canadian Quebec Agency for adopted Romanian children. She works for the Muscular Dystrophy Association through the annual Jerry Lewis Telethon and has a special interest in children charities in general.

- 1975 European Championships
  - Gold Medalist & European Champion: All Around
- 1976 OLYMPIC GAMES
  - Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion: All Around
  - Beam
  - Uneven Bars - 1st Perfect 10
  - Silver Medalist: Team
  - Bronze Medalist: Floor Exercise
- 1977 European Championships
  - Gold Medalist & European Champion: All Around
- 1979 European Championships
  - Gold Medalist & European Champion: All Around
- 1979 World Cup
  - Gold Medalist & World Cup Champion: All Around
  - Beam
  - Uneven Bar
- 1980 OLYMPIC GAMES
  - Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion: Beam
  - Floor Exercise
  - Silver Medalist: All Around
  - Team
- 1981 World University Games
  - Gold Medalist: All Around
  - Vault
  - Uneven Bars
  - Beam
  - Floor Exercise
  - Team
- 1984 Awarded the Olympic Order
- 1993 Inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame

## Bart Conner

Bart Conner was born in 1958 in Morton Grove, Illinois.

A two-time Olympic Champion, Bart accumulated more championships and honors than any other American gymnast. He competed for more than 16 years.

In 1976, he captured the first American Cup championship while earning spot as the youngest member of the 1976 U.S. Olympic team. At the 1984 L.A. Games, he won the gold on parallel bars and led the U.S. to the team-combined title. He was an NCAA champion representing the gymnastics team from University of Oklahoma. He was only the second American to win a gold medal in an international event when he finished first in the pommel horse at the 1979 world championships.



One interesting fact about Bart is that he is the only American gymnast, male or female, to win gold medals at every level of national or international competition. He is a junior national champion, an elite national champion, a Pan American Games champion, a World Cup champion (the first American to win a gold medal at a World Cup event), a World champion, and finally an Olympic champion.

1975 USGF Co-Champion of the USA, Elite Division, All-Around  
 1975 Pan American Games Champion: Team  
 1978 Champion of the 1st American Cup  
 1978 U.S. Olympic Team  
 1979 Champion of the USA, Elite Division, All-Around  
 1979 World Cup  
 Gold Medalist & World Cup Champion:  
 - Pommel Horse  
 - Parallel Bars  
 1980 U.S. Olympic Team  
 1981 American Cup Champion  
 1982 American Cup Champion  
 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES  
 Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion:  
 - Parallel Bars  
 Team  
 1981 Inducted into the USOC Olympic Hall of Fame  
 1988 Inducted into the USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame  
 1997 Inducted into the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame  
 1997 Inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame

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Conner won medals at three different Olympics. His best showing was at the 1984 Olympic Games, winning a gold medal in the parallel bars on the strength of two perfect scores. He also was part of the gold medal-winning U.S. men's team that year in Los Angeles.

## Olga Korbut

Perhaps no other gymnast ever did more to promote participation in the sport of gymnastics than did Olga Korbut. Her smile and personality opened the world to the joys of gymnastics. Olga won the hearts of millions of viewers as she took part in competitions and exhibitions throughout the world. Her appearances were packed to capacity and brought thousands of little girls into the sport. In 1988, Olga became the first inductee into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame.



Olga Korbut was born in Hrodna, in the former Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. She entered a government sports school when she was eleven and by the end of the 1960s she was among the

best Soviet gymnasts. At the 1972 Olympics she attracted everyone's attention with her three gold medals, her youthful enthusiasm and radiant smile. She received one of her gold medals as a member of the winning Soviet team and also took individual gold medals in the balance beam and the floor exercises, plus a silver medal on the uneven bars.

She has been called "The girl who brought the joy of gymnastics to the world". Olga was the most popular and well loved woman performer in the world between 1972 and 1976. Her daring and difficult routines coupled with her charismatic charm revolutionized gymnastics. More important; she encouraged participation in the sport such had never been known before.



In 1973 she toured North America with the Soviet gymnastics team and attracted record crowds. The crowd in Madison square Garden (19,694) was the largest ever to see a gymnastic event in North America. ABC-TV named her as the top athlete of 1972, while Associated press chose her as the Female Woman Athlete of the Year. Sports Illustrated chose her for their cover in March 1973. "Olga" had become a household name throughout the world.

She made her second Olympic appearance in 1976 in Montréal. Although she was overshadowed by the rising young Romanian star Nadia Comaneci, Olga won a gold medal as a member of the winning team and a silver medal for her performance on the balance beam.

She retired from competition after Montréal and eventually became a gymnastics instructor. Korbut was active in relief efforts in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in 1986, which took place near her home in Minsk, in what is now Belarus. Later she moved with her family to the United States, settling in Atlanta, Georgia.

1972 OLYMPIC GAMES  
Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion:  
- Beam  
- Floor Exercise  
- Team  
Silver Medalist:  
- Uneven Bars  
- Beam  
1976 OLYMPIC GAMES  
Gold Medalist & Olympic Champion:  
- Team 1988  
Inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame

# Shun Fujimoto

One of the most dramatic Olympic moments in history was provided by the 26-year-old male gymnast Shun Fujimoto of Japan during the 1976 Games. During his floor exercise, Fujimoto fractured his right leg. But with the Japanese in contention for a team gold medal, he refused to give up. Fitted with a plastic cast from hip to toe, he somehow competed in the ring exercises and achieved the highest score of his life. He finished with a triple somersault and twist that doomed him to excruciating pain when he landed. But he executed it flawlessly and fearlessly and maintained his balance long enough to clinch the gold for his team - before his leg crumpled grotesquely beneath him.

“It is beyond my comprehension,” said an Olympic doctor who treated Fujimoto, “how he could land without collapsing in screams. What a man.”

“Yes, the pain shot through me like a knife,” said Fujimoto. “It brought tears to my eyes. But now I have a gold medal, and the pain is gone.”