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# Little Girls In Pretty Boxes



## Synopsis

A sports reporter investigates the training of girls as professional gymnasts and figure skaters, arguing that the pressure to succeed and to look beautiful results in mental and physical harm, from eating disorders to psychological trauma.

## Book Information

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Disorders

## Customer Reviews

It's 22 years old but it is a valuable snapshot of gymnastics and skating of the previous twenty years, especially with the endurance of the Karolyis.

This is a terrific book on the state of woman's gymnastics and, to some extent, figure skating, though the primary focus of the book is on gymnastics. It focuses on the enormous demands made upon these young athletes by coaches, trainers, officials, and parents. Some of those demands are so unrealistic as to border on child abuse. There are athletes who starve themselves, who develop life threatening eating disorders, who perform dangerous maneuvers in the quest for the

gold, and who sometimes end up dead or devastatingly injured as a result. There is a lot of backstage dish in the book that is interesting. True life stories, some of which are heartbreaking, flesh out the allegations asserted by the author. The emphasis on being tiny and elfin has had enormous impact on elite female gymnasts. One sees the difference in just by looking comparatively at the women's U.S. Olympic gymnastic teams from 1976 and 1992. The photographs in the book best illustrate this and the comparison bespeaks volumes. Elite gymnastics went from being a woman's sport to a girl's sport, as the author has sagely noted, and the photographs corroborate that assertion. Moreover, while some measures have been taken, such as raising the age for Olympic competition in 2000 from fifteen to sixteen, at the same time the minimum level of difficulty has increased, making an already dangerous sport more dangerous. Remember, elite gymnastics is a sport fraught with the potential for devastating spinal cord injuries. The author recounts a number of these heartbreaking injuries and the circumstances under which they occurred, leaving the reader to ask oneself, "Just what were these coaches thinking? The pressure that some of these girls and young women endure is truly unbelievable. The demands upon them are often unrealistic, stunting not only their physical development, but their social and emotional development, as well. Competing with serious injuries, while taking potent drugs for the excruciating pain, is simply not commensurate with a sensible athletic regimen. Parents who are living their dreams through their children are often as dangerous as unscrupulous and unqualified coaches. Many force their children to compete merely to satisfy their own desires for personal glory, badgering and berating their offspring every step of the way. Coaches, likewise, have their own dreams. Everyone wants to produce Olympians, but at what cost? This is an excellent book with a lot of information, both anecdotal and empirical. When purchasing the book, however, be sure to get the latest edition, as it has been updated with information on the state of gymnastics as of the year 2000. It also contains 24 pages of photographs, including 8 new pages for the updated edition.

I read this book with interest. It told the shocking details of the abuse the athletes of women's gymnastics and ladies' skating suffer at the hands/voices of coaches who only care about winning. Some of the techniques used were barbaric and torture for the children. They were not adults. Some died due to dangerous techniques or the prevalent eating disorders that were encouraged. The athletes were forced to compete on injured limbs and have lifelong damage. I thought the personal anecdotes made the points the author was stressing more personal and believable. Since the book was published, even more abuse and deceit have come to light in the gymnastics world. I would think carefully and read this book before encouraging a child to enter this world of abuse and

disposable athletes.

good condition

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in gymnastics. I have been a gymnastics fan for years. I had heard things about various coaches, but had no idea that the problems were so deep and so widespread. Parents need to choose coaches more carefully for their girls. Something definitely needs to change in this sport. There must be higher requirements for coaches. They need to be educated in female adolescent psychology and psychology. This book gives tremendous insight into many tragic injuries and even deaths of our young female gymnasts.

Excellent book. A well written expose of the ultra competitive worlds of professional gymnastics and figure skating. As a gymnastics fan it will be hard to watch the olympics in the future without wondering about the mental and physical sacrifice behind the smiles and pigtails. Will also spare a thought for those young girls who "failed" to make it, physically and mentally broken by the win at all costs mentality.

As a gymnastics fan, there's always been two sides of me: On the one hand I enjoy watching little girls flip over, and fly in the air-things that you and I would never think of trying our selves. On the other hand-I've been concerned over the years about what these girls go through to make it to the elite or olylimpic levels. In 1994 when Christy Henrich died as a result of eating disorders. That's when I begin asking some serious questions about the sport. One thing that needs to be made VERY clear: Ryan was NOT dealing with what is called recreational gymnastics, Doing gymnastics for fun and fitness. It can be a rewarding sport for chidren. What Ryan DOES deal with is the elite or olylimpic levels of the sport. It documents the disturbing training methods of Bela Karloli. I've been concerned about this for a long time-but now the truth is told-and the truth hurts. It also documents the belittling coments that coaches often say to the gymnasts about weight. This often triggers an eating disorder. This is sickening. Coaches like Karloi would just like to blame parents for these problems. While parents do play a role, it's the coaches coments made to gymnasts that triggers it. So coaches needs to held reponsible for it. Ryan tells it like it is-she pulls no punches. This is not an anti-gymnastics book. It's instead a disturbing document of the training methods of coaches and forcing them to compete with injuries. Then there's the disgusting story of the second Trial that was held to determine the 1992 olympic team that resulted in Kim kelly being voted off the team. Kim

Kelly did not have the ideal body type of a gymnast-and USA Gymnastics(Then called United States Gymnastics Federation)were concerned that she would not get high enough scores because she was not the little girl like the others were. This is WRONG and lets hope that it does not happen again.This edition includes an update on the state of gymnastics up to 2000. While progress has been made in making the sport safer, Ryan notes that there's a long way to go.

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