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Judging the Basics—The Front Handspring Vault

A front handspring vault is an incredibly important gymnastics skill. Not only does it offer a decent start value for relatively inexperienced gymnasts, it's also the basis of many harder vaults. It's important that as officials, we are scoring the vault with an eye on the technique. Once your eye is trained to see each aspect of the front handspring, officiating the more difficult vaults should come with ease.

There are five phases to a great front handspring: Run, First-Flight, Support/Repulsion, Second-Flight and Landing. These factors can only be evaluated by an actual performance; however, we can illustrate the common IF/THEN of first-flight and second-flight trajectories and study the results of different body position errors on the final outcomes of the vault.

Let's first discuss a model handspring vault. This vault has a low angle of entry, a vertical repulsion, a strong rise and resulting distance is achieved.

Let's discuss some common variations from that ideal vault.

Example 1: The Piked Fall Over

In this example, the gymnast pikes during the first-flight phase and tucks her head, often producing an arm bend and a pike on the table. She then extends from the pike in the second-flight phase and, if done quickly, there will be a very small amount of height produced by the extension from the pike along with the push from the arms. Common deductions would include: hip angle in first flight (.1-.2), too long in support (.2-.3), bent arms (.1-.2), pike in post flight (.1), insufficient height (.15-.3), insufficient distance (.2-.3), insufficient dynamics (.2-.3). Score range: 7.1-7.55

Example 2: The Stuck In Handstand

Here is your typical slow beginner vault. The gymnast tries for a straight body but without enough power, the momentum fades, the elbows bend, the body arches to create an arc and the gymnast falls off the table. Common deductions would include: hip angle in first-flight (.1-.2), too long in support (.4-.5), bent arms (.05-.15), second-flight arch (.15-.3), insufficient height (.3-.5), insufficient distance (.2-.3), insufficient dynamics (.2-.3). Score range: 6.05-7.2.

Example 3: The Tuck-Kick Out

Another beginner vault, the gymnast has body shape errors throughout the vault, most notably, a tight tucked position during the first-flight phase. Once on the table the knees and hips are extended to an arch, but the entire vault is slow. The result is average speed and the only height to be attained is from the extension from the tuck. Common deductions would include: first flight tuck (.15-.3), support phase tuck (.05-.15), too long in support (.1-.25), second-flight arch (.1-.2), insufficient height (.15-.3), insufficient distance (.2-.3), insufficient dynamics (.2-.3). Score range: 6.8-7.65

Something to Consider: Now that we've looked at three very common variations of the front handspring vault, let's score that "pretty good vault" that will continue to get better with more speed in the run. With more acceleration, the vault has a good chance of getting off the table vertically. Common deductions would include: first flight (0), time in support (.05-.1), second-flight angel off (.05-.1), insufficient height (.05-.15), insufficient distance (.1), insufficient dynamics (.1-.2). Score range: 7.95-8.25 (Regional Qualifying)