

# SPORTS Legends

*Strength*



*National  
Pride*

*Grace*

# LINOY ASHRAM





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## Early Life

Linoy Ashram was born on May 13, 1999, in Rishon LeZion, Israel, to her parents, Oren and Hedva, who are of **Mizrahi Jewish (Yemeni Jewish)** and **Sephardi Jewish (Greek Jewish)** descent.

At the age of seven, Linoy transformed what some would call a problem into her greatest talent. She was hyperactive as a young girl and had a hard time sitting still. Her mother wanted to figure out how to channel that energy into something positive and heard about a gymnastics program nearby. She enrolled Linoy, who ended up loving it. This would be a decision that would change her life forever.

Linoy had an amazing, self-driven rise from a working class background, putting all her focus into gymnastics. At 10 years old, she met her coach, Ayelet Zussman, a former Israeli gymnastics champion in her own right, and they began their journey together. When she was in the 8th grade, Linoy stopped attending school to focus on training and finished her education at home.

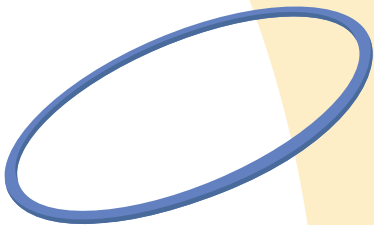


# What is Women's Rhythmic Gymnastics?

Added formally to the Olympics in 1984, women's rhythmic gymnastics incorporates elements of gymnastics and dance while using **apparatus** like the ball, hoop, rope, clubs, and ribbon. In each of the five events, the gymnast incorporates the equipment into creative movements as she dances and tumbles on a carpeted mat. There are individual as well as group competitions. Final scores are calculated by adding up execution, artistry, and difficulty points. When gymnasts make mistakes, points are subtracted from their final score.



**The ball,** made of rubber or plastic, is 7 to 7.9 inches in diameter and weighs at least .88 pounds.



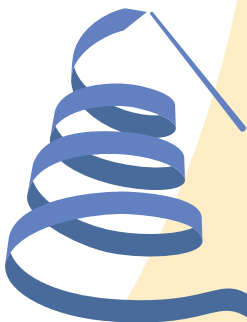
**The hoop,** made of wood or plastic, must have an inner diameter of 31.5 to 35.4 inches and a minimum weight of .66 pounds.



**The rope,** made of hemp, is knotted at each end. Its length is determined by the height of the gymnast.



**The clubs,** made of wood or plastic, resemble bowling pins.



**The ribbon,** a strip of satin, is attached to a wooden stick that is at least 19 feet and 8 inches long. Holding the stick, the gymnast must keep the ribbon in constant motion throughout her routine.

# Linoy and Ayelet: The Dynamic Duo

Linoy and Ayelet developed a strong bond from the very beginning. Ayelet recalled when she first met Linoy: “She was 10 years old with a sparkle in her eyes. I fell in love with her.” Ayelet noticed Linoy’s drive right away, recounting, “As a girl, Linoy had terrible feet, without **pointe**. She didn’t look like a classical gymnast. Around the age of 14, during the entire summer, she worked on her feet. So right away I realized that there was something different about her.” Ayelet, the former Israeli gymnastics champion of 1994, saw that Linoy had what it took to go the distance. She recognized early on that Linoy was:

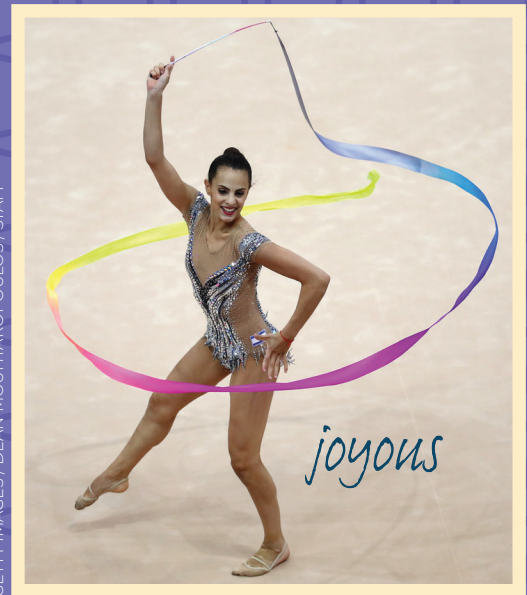
*“... not just a gymnast.  
She can achieve greatness,  
and she is our future.”*



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Linoy had a deep connection with Ayelet as well. She would go on to say, “Ayelet senses me every moment. She maybe understands me even more than my mother. Without saying a word, she knows what to say to me and is so considerate towards me.” With their strong connection to one another, the pair were ready to take the gymnastics world by storm.





## Competing

From the age of 12, Linoy set her sights on competition that would end up taking her all over the world. She traveled from Estonia to Moscow, from Italy to Belarus, from Uzbekistan to China—collecting bronze, silver, and gold medals in many of her championships.

When competing, Linoy had no favorite

among the four main objects: ribbon, ball, hoop, or clubs. Each required a different style of dance and routine as well as different music. She excitedly described how she and Ayelet would pick the music to match each apparatus: the hoop is “dramatic,” the ribbon is “joyous,” the ball is “romantic,” and the clubs are “groovy.”

## Service Matters to Linoy

In November of 2017, at the age of 18, Linoy, as most Israeli teenagers are required to do, enrolled in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a soldier. She was assigned the rank of “outstanding athlete,” which the IDF designates to stellar athletes before their service. That distinction also allowed her time to continue her gymnastics training. Of her time in the IDF, she described, “At 8:00 AM, I go to the army until 11:00 AM. I have to go every day except when I have competition, then I get a day off from the army. I am like a secretary. I have a really nice boss. I do all the administration. I really love it...” Her father has made a career of serving in the Israeli army, which fills her with great pride. She served in the IDF as an **administrative assistant** until her honorable discharge in December of 2019.



IDF soldiers in Jerusalem, Israel



GETTY IMAGES / JOEL CARILLET

“It is very important for Israelis to serve their country in some way, even if it is through administration, and even if it's only for a few hours a day.”





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## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE ISRAELI FLAG?

Israel's national flag consists of a white field bearing two horizontal blue stripes and a central Shield of David, better known as the Star of David. The blue bands are based on the "tallit," or Jewish prayer shawl, while the star is a widely used symbol of Jews, Judaism, and Israel.

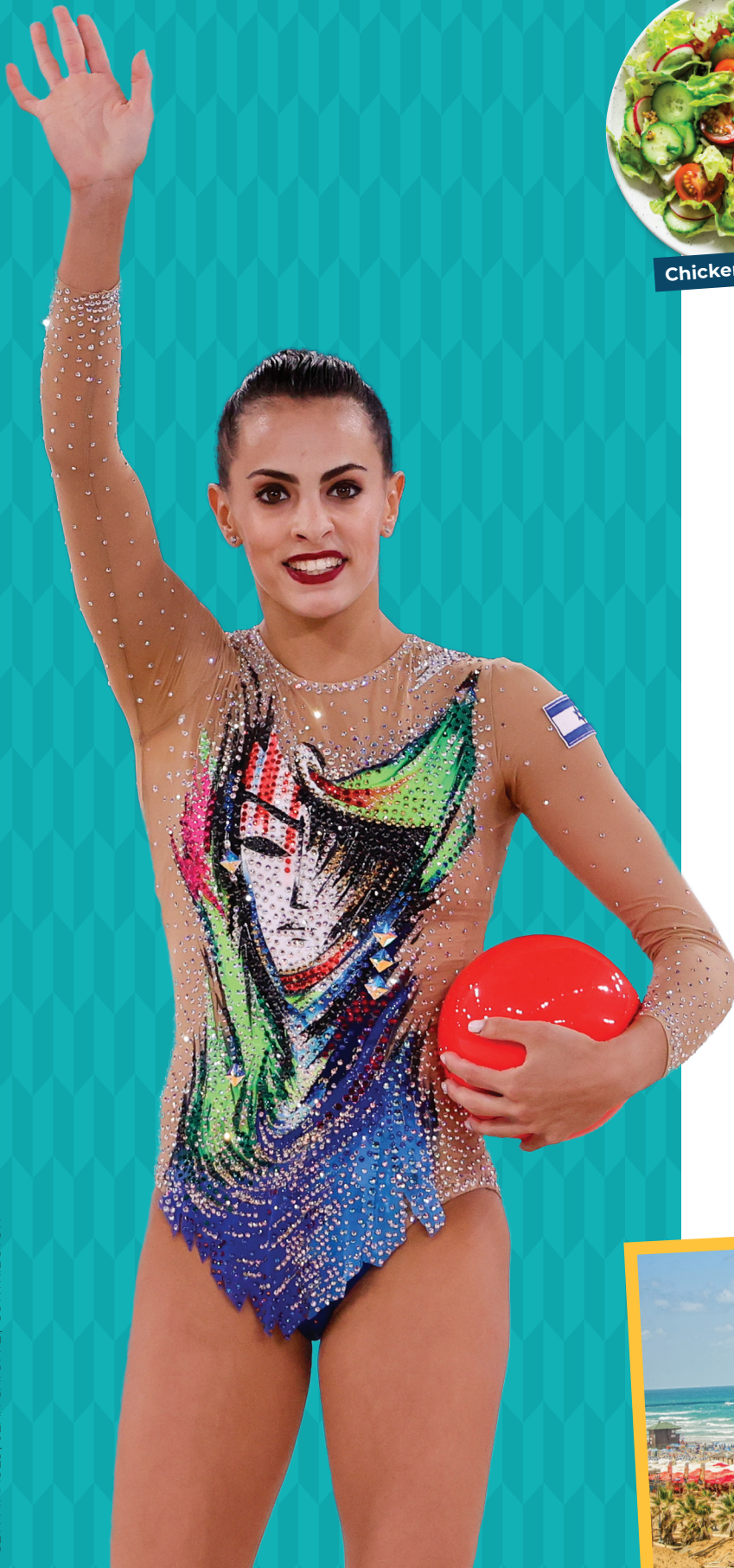
## Israel Defense Forces (IDF)

In 1948, during its War for Independence, Israel established the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF's code of ethics features a section on "purity of arms," that states that arms are to be used only in defense and upholds humanistic values even under fire. At the age of 18, every Jewish Israeli male and female is required to serve in the IDF, which plays a social role as a primary melting pot and equalizer for Israel, a country of many immigrants. Other groups such as Druse, Cherkessian, Bedouin, Christians, and Arab-Israelis also volunteer to serve in the IDF. Enlistment in the IDF is a significant milestone for young Israelis, and they serve in many roles and units such as the Air Force, Intelligence, Navy, and even the military band.



Emblem of the Israel Defense Forces. The Hebrew reads: "The Army of Defense for Israel."





Chicken Schnitzel

## Fun Facts about Linoy

- ★ She is 5 feet, 4 inches tall.
- ★ She loves her mom's homemade chicken schnitzel.
- ★ She enjoys watching romantic comedies.
- ★ She likes to hike and be outdoors in nature.
- ★ She describes herself as being "very shy" in her everyday life. But, "as soon as I'm on the mat, I'm a whole different person."
- ★ She enjoys going to the beach because it is peaceful.
- ★ She has a move named after her, called "The Ashram," which is a "back-bend turn on floor."



Beach at Rishon LeZion

# A Moment of Silence for the Tragedy at the 1972 Munich Games

On September 5, 1972, members of the Israeli Olympic team were taken hostage at the poorly secured athletes' village by Palestinian gunmen from the Black September group. Within 24 hours, 11 Israeli athletes and coaches, five Palestinian hostage-takers, and a German policeman were dead after a standoff and subsequent rescue effort erupted into gunfire. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) at the time decided not to stop or interrupt the Games. The tragedy caused the Israeli delegation

to withdraw from the remainder of the Games, as the State of Israel was in mourning.

During the 2021 Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony, the Israeli athletes who lost their lives were finally remembered with a moment of silence for the first time in 49 years. Relatives of those killed had sought for them to be remembered at previous opening ceremonies, but the IOC had ignored those requests for half a century.



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Portraits of the eleven Israeli athletes and coaches slain in West Germany at the 1972 Olympic Games. They are (top left to right): Yosef Gutfreund, 40; Moshe Weinberg, 33; Yoseph Romano, 32; David Berger, 28; Mark Slavin, 18; Yaacov Springer, 52; (bottom left to right): Ze'ev Friedman, 28; Amitsur Shapira, 40; Eliezer Halfin, 24; Kehat Schorr, 53; Andre Spitzer, 27.

# The Power of Tenacity—Going from Last to First

Shortly after Linoy's military service, the Olympics came calling. The Tokyo Games were slated to be held in 2020, but due to the COVID-19 **pandemic**, the Games were pushed back to 2021. This news was upsetting for Linoy, but she decided to shift her perspective and use the extra time to her advantage by accepting that she would have "another full year to get better."

Linoy would make sure she was ready to compete in the biggest competition of her life.

But even with the extra year of preparations and training, the Tokyo Games did not get off to a smooth start for Linoy. She remembered, "I entered the gymnasium in Tokyo to train, and it did not go well. I felt my feet shaking, and so many thoughts ran through my head. I said to myself that I have reached the moment that I have waited for, the most important event of my life and one that I invested 15 years into. I was petrified that everything would fall apart, and I knew that this was the last stop of my career. I can now say that I felt the biggest responsibility in my entire career." Little did she know that her biggest fear was about to become a reality.



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"I am very tough. I am stubborn. I was born into a house where all of us kids were taught to have goals.

I am a perfectionist. If something doesn't work, I will do it 100 times until it goes well. I never give up."



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“I’ll never forget my first rotation in Tokyo,” Linoy recalled. “I never thought in my worst nightmares that in hoop, my strongest discipline, I would do so poorly. I ranked 16th and [...] Ayelet said, ‘Forget about it, and just get into the final. It doesn’t matter from whatever place.’ I told myself that the worst was now behind me because there was nowhere lower to go, as I was at that point already. It was a very long and endless day, at the end of which I was in third place, which meant I was in the running for a medal.” Linoy was

determined. She put her mishap in the past and pushed forward. With her endless determination, Linoy reached the final rounds, where she placed first in three out of the four rotations. With every leap, spin, trick, and roll, the gold medal was closer and closer within her grasp. When the final scores were tallied from all her events (hoop, ball, clubs, and ribbon), Linoy’s score was a mere 0.15 of a point higher than Russian gold medal favorite, Dina Averina, meaning that Linoy had done it! She had won gold in the individual all-around final!

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“This sport is ruled by Eastern Europeans. Due to the fact I’m not of Eastern European origin and knowing that everyone usually thinks that the successful gymnasts are Eastern European, I wanted to prove that it doesn’t have to be that way.”

Her win should have been a joyous occasion for her, for the Israeli team, and for the state of Israel, but it caused a huge upset. Linoy stated, “It’s true that this sport is dominated by people from Eastern Europe. The best athletes are from there. When I was young, I never imagined that it would be possible to reach their level because it [felt like] their sport. But as I went from competition to competition and I got better, I began to realize that it doesn’t really matter where [you’re from] or who dominates the sport. I can still win it because of who I am.”

Because Dina and her twin sister, Arina, were favorites for the top medals, the Russian Olympic Committee called the result an “injustice” and submitted an official inquiry. In the end, the International Gymnastics Federation dismissed all accusations of unfair judging. Linoy recounted, “I really didn’t pay attention to what they were saying— [my coach and I] were completely focused on the win.” After Linoy won the gold, Ayelet would proudly go on to say:

*“Linoy Ashram was the mission of my life, and the mission was successfully achieved.”*



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## An Extra Special Win

Linoy's gold medal win was extra special since Israel had never medaled in rhythmic gymnastics before. It was only the third gold medal ever won by Israel in any sport at the Olympic Games. She would humbly go on to say, "I came to Tokyo with the goal of giving my all and experiencing the moment and the feeling of being there, at the Olympics. I knew that, if I did well, I could return with some kind of medal, but I didn't imagine what color it would be. The idea that it would be gold didn't enter my head."

Olympic competition and stardom came with its challenges, but Linoy would not be derailed. She had a mixture of emotions as COVID-19 restrictions prevented her family from watching her performances in person. Additionally, while there was great joy when she took

home the gold medal, the great "upset" led to a wave of online criticism. Despite the insults, she enjoyed her moment, and with gracious gratitude acknowledged her greatest supporters: "I want to thank my parents Hedva and Oren for everything; and without my coach Ayelet Zussman, I am certain that I would not be an Olympic champion. If I could cut the medal in half, I would give her one of those parts."

Her advice to athletes after this experience was: "That's the measure of an athlete. A good athlete is one who has the ability after a fall or a mistake to come back. That is what every athlete needs to know."





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## The Honor of Representing Israel

Linoy is very proud of her Israeli nationality and being able to represent her country. Her faith played a large role in her life, especially right before the Olympic Games. She stated, "I went with Ayelet to the Western Wall before we flew to Japan, and I placed a note there. I light the candles on Shabbat, fast on Yom Kippur, and I recited 'Shema Yisrael' to myself before every routine."

She is also proud to be one of the few Jewish **elite** athletes. She demonstrated this for the world to see by performing her gold medal routine to the classic Hebrew song, "Hava Nagila," a staple of Jewish celebrations everywhere. Linoy explained,

"We brought in 'Hava Nagila' because we wanted to bring to the Olympics this year something Israeli, something Jewish [...] It shows how much we're really connected to the country, and we want to bring this Jewish touch to the world."

Ashram's choice in Tokyo for her clubs routine was a mash-up of Beyoncé's and Ciara's pop hits, but for her ribbon routine, she picked "Hava Nagila," since it completely checked the "joyous" music box for her.

"I'm very proud of my country, and I'm proud to represent my country in the best way that I can," she added. In turn, the people of Israel are very proud of Linoy. She is a national treasure, not just for her gold medal, but also because she is so representative of the people of Israel. They see a bit of themselves in her, and in such a small country, they truly feel a connection to her.



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# Retirement at 22: Hanging Up Her Gold Medal

Knowing that a gymnastics career doesn't last long due to its many physical demands, Linoy enrolled at Ono Academic College in Kiryat Ono, Israel, in 2019, to study education. She graduated in 2022 and now works as a member of the training staff for the Israeli National Rhythmic Gymnastics team, while residing in her hometown of Rishon LeZion, Israel.

When Linoy announced her **retirement** at the age of 22, she said, "An athlete must know when it is time to retire and step away. I realized my dream, and I reached the top of my profession."

Her plan is to be a coach and give Israel's youth the support she received in her



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career. Linoy's father Oren thinks she is the perfect person for the job. "Linoy now embarks on a new journey, and I am confident that she will be successful in that. I told her as a six-year-old that whatever she wants to accomplish, it will happen. But this was a decision solely on her part. Once she reached the top, it was time to retire and move on, and I am certain that as a coach, she will reach new heights."

Linoy's career has been filled with many outstanding achievements. She has won 11 medals (six silver, five bronze) at the World Championships, seven medals (two gold, two silver, three bronze) at the European Championships, and many other medals around the world, including:

- The 2018 World All-Around silver medalist
- The 2017 and 2019 World All-Around bronze medalist
- The 2019 European Games All-Around silver medalist





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"When I was young, I dreamed of competing in the Olympics, and then I won a gold medal. It's like a dream..."



## Linoy's Medals

EVENT	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Olympic Games	1	0	0
World Championships	0	6	5
World Games	0	1	1
European Games	2	2	0
European Championships	2	2	3
Grand Prix Final	1	4	1
FIG World Cup	18	17	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>

# Key Accomplishments

Besides being the first Israeli female Olympian to win a gold medal and the third Israeli Olympian to become a gold medalist, Linoy has set many records:

- ★ In 2015, she became the first Israeli rhythmic gymnast to win gold at the Grand Prix Final in Brno and the second-youngest rhythmic gymnast to medal at the Grand Prix Final.
- ★ In 2017, Linoy was the first Israeli rhythmic gymnast to win the bronze medal in the individual all-around category at the World Championships.
- ★ In 2018, she was the first Israeli to win the gold medal in the all-around category at the Guadalajara World Cup.
- ★ In 2020, she was the first Israeli rhythmic gymnast to win the all-around title at the 2020 European Championships.



# How is Rhythmic Gymnastics Judged and Scored?

- ✓ Individual routines are 75 to 90 seconds long, with penalties given for shorter or longer performances. The gymnast must have physical contact with the apparatus before the routine starts and when it ends. Faults are assigned and are categorized into small, medium, and major faults. Some common faults include dropping or breaking an apparatus, crossing the boundaries of the floor, or falling.
- ✓ Each apparatus has two juries—one with four judges who determine the difficulty score, and the other with five judges who determine the execution score. The maximum score for each is 10 points for a total possible score of 20 points for each apparatus. The highest and lowest scores are dropped, and the remaining ones are averaged. A competition with four apparatus would give a possible maximum score of 80 points.
- ✓ Group routines, which last from two minutes and 15 seconds to two minutes and 30 seconds, use the same penalty system for time and for each athlete's performance (e.g., if two fall, two penalties are given). Collisions between gymnasts or apparatus are also faulted.





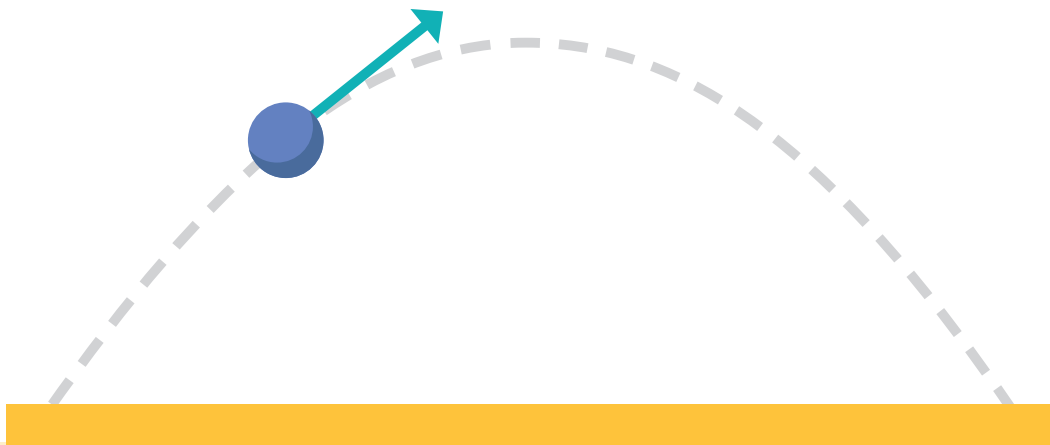
# The Physics of Rhythmic Gymnastics

Rhythmic gymnastics can seem to defy the laws of gravity—so the rules of physics are part of a gymnast’s training. One example is the physics involved with a “risk,” which is when an apparatus is thrown. Risks are vital elements of routines, and the gymnast must calculate what dance or acrobatic moves she can make before having to catch the object. The trajectory angle is important for the gymnast to calculate. The trajectory angle is the path of an apparatus as it moves through the air, determined by the forces



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of thrust and gravity, and the angle of the release point. A change in any of these will change the path of the object as it moves through the air. The higher or farther the gymnast throws it, the more time she gets to do a dance move and the farther she may have to travel to then catch the object.



Also, the speed created by throwing the apparatus will determine how high it will go and the amount of time to perform the risk. For instance, a strong throw will make it go faster and shorten the time to finish a risk. Gymnasts usually learn this all through practice and don’t have to brush up on their knowledge of physics—their muscle memory kicks in, and through repeated practice, they remember what they need to do.





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## Vocabulary

**Mizrahi Jewish (Yemeni Jewish):**

Jewish people who have Middle Eastern ancestry from countries like Yemen, Iraq, and Iran.

**Sephardi Jewish (Greek Jewish):**

Jewish people whose ancestors left Portugal and Spain after the 1492 expulsion, where country leaders forced Jews to leave if they did not convert to Christianity. Many settled in Europe and North Africa, as well as the Ottoman Empire, specifically Greece and Turkey.

**Apparatus:** Five pieces of equipment a rhythmic gymnast uses during her routines, which include the ribbon, hoop, clubs, ball, and rope. In a four-year competitive cycle, the International Gymnastics Federation decides which four of the five apparatus will be used during competition, which is why the rope wasn't used in the Tokyo Games.

**Pointe:** The positioning of the toes downward to create an unbroken visual line from the knee to the ends of the toes.

**Administrative Assistant:** An employee who works under a supervisor to help organize schedules, appointments, and other necessary assignments.

**Pandemic:** A disease that affects a particular country or the entire world.

**Elite:** A small group that is better than the rest, when it comes to abilities.

**Retirement:** When a person leaves their main career or stops working entirely.

# OLYMPIANS

**KERRI  
STRUG**

**ERIC  
LIDDELL**

**LINOY  
ASHRAM**

**HERB  
BROOKS**



**COLLECT ALL  
THE OLYMPIAN  
TOKENS!**

Cut out and paste tokens for each of the the 4 featured Olympians onto the spaces above.





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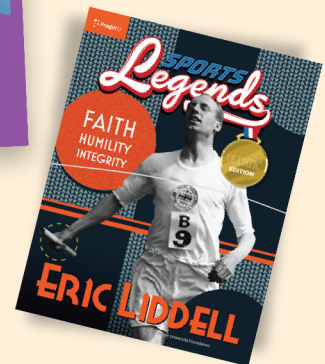
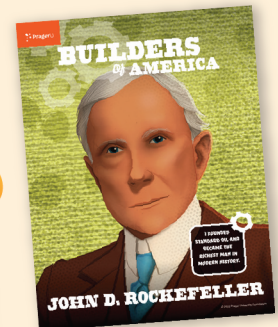
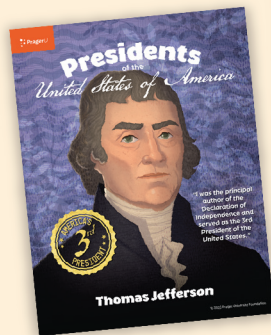
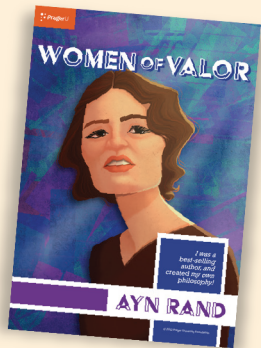
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