



## Letters to a Young Gymnast

By *Nadia Comaneci*

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### Letters to a Young Gymnast By Nadia Comaneci

If there were such a thing as an "elder" stateswoman in women's gymnastics today, Nadia Comaneci would win that title as readily as she once won gold medals. Olga Korbut came before her, and many other medalists would follow, but none has ever been as dominant in winning the hearts of millions around the world. With grit and determination, Nadia Comaneci ushered in a new era for women's sports, one where young girls could vault into the arena of superstardom. Even today, almost thirty years after her greatest triumphs, you need only mention the name "Nadia" and gymnastics fans know instantly whom you are talking about. In *Letters to a Young Gymnast*, Nadia shows what it takes to achieve athletic perfection and become the best. With inspiring and dramatic stories from her own experience, she tells us how the young girl that Bela Karolyi discovered in a Romanian elementary school found the inner strength to become a world-class athlete at such a young age. This collection of Nadia's memories, anecdotes, and advice grants unique insights into the mind of a top competitor. From how to live after you've realized your dream, to the necessity of "a spirit forged with mettle," Nadia's thoughts on athleticism and sacrifice are eye-opening and surprisingly challenging.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Although part of a mentoring series (Letters to a Young Lawyer; Letters to a Young Chef; etc.), this memoir is less about motivating aspiring gymnasts than justifying the author's life choices. Romanian-born Comaneci took the sports world by storm when, at the age of 14, she was the first person in Olympic history to earn a perfect score in gymnastics. At the event she garnered several more medals. When the author recounts her early years with legendary coach Bela Karolyi and details how his intensive training requirements plus her own determination led to her success, the text is engrossing. Comaneci, however, devotes far too much space to discussing the controversies that dogged her career. She refutes the oft-repeated accusation that Karolyi abusively overworked his young gymnasts and further denies that she drank bleach when the Romanian government assigned her to another coach. Although Comaneci's descriptions of her harsh life in Romania (although far easier than most) under dictator Ceausescu are compelling, and her decision to defect in 1989 completely understandable, she does not acknowledge that the man who facilitated her escape, Constantin Panait, was anything other than a personal manager. According to newspaper reports at the time, Panait, married with four children, controlled her life and finances and was responsible for TV bookings where the gymnast appeared overweight and inappropriately dressed. More discussions about the sport and less defensiveness about mostly forgotten gossip would have strengthened this mentoring guide.

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### About the Author

Born in 1961 in Onesti, Romania, **Nadia Comaneci** made sports history during the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal by scoring the first perfect "10.00" in a gymnastics competition. By the end of that Olympiad, she had repeated that feat six more times, winning three gold medals, as well as silver and bronze. She defected to the U.S. in 1989. Since then she has remained very active in promoting her sport, and is now married to American gymnast Bart Conner, himself a two-time Olympic champion. Together they run the Bart Conner Gymnastics Academy, publish International Gymnast magazine, run Perfect 10 Productions, and travel the world in support of the Special Olympics, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and other charities. She lives in Norman, Oklahoma.

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