

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IAPS GYMNASTICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

1982 - 1994

For those of you who are interested in the history of the IAPS gymnastics championships, the competition is very much woven into what we now call the "I.S.G.A. Girls Premier 5 Piece National Championships" tapestry. The competition first started in 1979 under the auspices of the AHMPS (The Association of Head Mistresses in Preparatory Schools), when the Junior (under 11) and Senior (under 13) girls age groups were established. It was founded by the Headmaster of Dover College Junior School, Mr Richard Rottenbury, and held at Folkestone Sports Centre for the first three years. **

In 1982 AHMPS amalgamated with IAPS and the competition, now in its fourth year, became known as the "IAPS Championships".

Having first entered his teams the year before, when it was hosted by Red House School, and held at the Thornaby Pavilion, Stockton-on-Tees, Lawrence Groves volunteered to host it in 1983 on his home territory in Dorset. Port Regis School, nr Shaftesbury, with its own large multi-purpose sports hall in the beautiful Motcombe Park, proved an ideal venue and the first time the one day competition was actually staged at a school.

The following year Libby Craig, a PE teacher from Stamford Junior School in Lincolnshire, entered the sixth Championship, when it returned to its former home at Dover College, Folkestone for the last time. In 1985 the event was staged for the last time outside a school environment, in Durrington Sport Centre, Worthing, with Windlesham House, the host school organisers, and it was held for the first time on a Saturday.

In 1987 the competition was held over two days, Friday and Saturday at Stamford High School and the Under 10 category was added. The second time it was hosted at Stamford in 1991, Princess Anne joined the audience on the Saturday, to watch daughter Zara compete for Port Regis in the Under 10 age group. 14 year old Laura Timmins, of Wrekin College, missed the event to take part in the British Women's Championships to become the youngest gymnast to take the title. The Sunday morning at Stamford was given over to a senior, U18 competition (not IAPS), normally held in the autumn term.

In twelve of the first thirteen years under the IAPS banner, the 5 Piece competition was organised or overseen by Lawrence Groves, the gymnastics coach and PE teacher at Port Regis School. Both Port Regis and Stamford hosted three championships each. The last IAPS 5 Piece championships took place abroad for the first time in 1994, hosted by the British School of the Netherlands in Den Haag, with the British Ambassador as the Guest of Honour. Twenty one schools made their way over to Holland and nineteen judges flew out to officiate. Many schools added an extra day to ensure as much sightseeing could be fitted in as possible and numerous souvenir clogs found their way back to the UK. A thoroughly enjoyable time was had by all!

Over the thirteen years a number of guest teams participated that were not technically a part of the IAPS association, which began to cause concern. So in 1995 the Girls' Independent Schools Gymnastics Association, "GISGA", was formed which allowed various age group teams from independent schools, from any association, or indeed none at all, to participate in the competitions. The IAPS national championships were moved to the autumn term, whilst the GISGA competition continued in early March. Up to this point there had been only one competition weekend each year.

Since the organisation split, both competitions have grown. The IAPS competition has continued to flourish in its own right. Lawrence Groves continued to head up the IAPS championships for a few years until he moved abroad. He is now back in England as the Headmaster of St Faith's at Ash, an ISA school near Canterbury.

Today the IAPS event continues to cater for girls across three age groups, U10, U11 & U13. When the two organisations divided, it was always the intention to continue to use the same rules and competition outline as GISGA and that remains the case today. The Team competition has four disciplines: Set Floor and Set Vault, Voluntary Floor and Voluntary Vault. However the Group Sequence is a separate optional competition with its own awards. Libby Craig, who later became Headmistress of Stamford Junior School, also went on to become the National Chairman of Sport and Vice-Chairman of IAPS and after she retired, in 2012 took on the role of National Sports Ambassador for IAPS. Libby became GISGA's first Chairman 1994 – 2014, and then its first President in 2014.

Linda McNally, the General Secretary of GISGA, took over the role of National IAPS gymnastics representative and continues to be the driving force behind the annual one day November championships today.

** See the document on I.S.G.A. website: HISTORY / IAPS:

IAPS GIRLS' GYMNASTICS CHAMPIONSHIPS THE PRECURSOR: "AHMPS ERA" 1979 - 1891