

## **The Beginning of the Industry**

The manufactured trampoline, as we know it today, was created by two men, George Nissen and Larry Griswold. Around 1935, Griswold, then the assistant gymnastics coach at the University of Iowa, and Nissen, a tumbler on the University of Iowa gymnastics team, "made regular jaunts to Bloomington, Illinois where numerous circus people had their winter homes. Among them were the "Flying Wards", some of the finest trapeze performers in the world. Griswold and Nissen worked out with them at the local YMCA, and frequently helped them make or mend their large trapeze nets. Nissen remembers the hours they spent in the basement of the YMCA, threading the long cords of the nets, using large javelin-head needles. This experience was one of several that led them to the idea of creating a trampoline.

One day, with the help of the wrestling coach at the University of Iowa, Griswold and Nissen bolted together an angle iron frame. A piece of canvas, in which they had inserted grommets along each side, was then attached to the frame by using springs. This was the first trampoline.

"Since Nissen was still training for tumbling, they decided to move the trampoline to a YMCA camp where he was an instructor. There, during his free time, Nissen used it for his tumbling training. Immediately, he found that the children loved it. This was the first realization that the trampoline could be more than a piece of equipment to use when performing, or seriously training. It was something that many others could enjoy.

(In 1942) Griswold and Nissen decided to formalize their small operation of making trampolines. They created the Griswold-Nissen Trampoline & Tumbling Company, and history was made...."

(from "Larry Griswold ....The Diving Fool" by Lani Lokendahle; World Acrobatics Society Newsletter; August 1997)

## **Where Does the Name "Trampoline" Come From?**

"El trampolin" means diving board, in Spanish. George Nissen, the co-creator of the competitive style trampoline, heard the word on a performance tour in Mexico in the late 1930's. He liked the sound of it, and decided to Anglicize the spelling and call his bouncing rig a Trampoline, a term he registered as a trademark.

## **The Development of the Sport**

The sports of trampolining and tumbling are as old as man, a reflection of man's desire to defy the ever-pervading presence of gravity.

A number of cultures have devised apparatus to send an athlete into the air, i.e., an outstretched animal skin being used to throw up, and safely receive, the descending performer. Circuses have used a number of devices to show off aerial and floor somersault activity.

The way the activities are now practiced reflect the intrusion, delightful in this instance, of modern technology. Modern trampolining has only emerged in the last 49-50 years from the prototype apparatus built by George Nissen, USA, in his garage in 1936. The Air Force, and later the Space Agencies were not slow to employ trampolines with their pilots and astronauts. Medical authorities and those working with handicapped persons have found many exciting benefits from being able to use a trampoline. At the recreational level trampolining has an immediate appeal, especially for the young people.

Every era produces at least one step forward in the sophistication of a trampoline machine used. The most modern ones are capable of projecting an athlete to such a height that the top stars can touch 10m-high ceilings and perform repetition triple somersaults with ease.

Competitive activity commenced in the USA at the conclusion of World War II. The activity spread to Europe in the 1950's and display teams took the activity to all continents in the late 1950's and early 1960's, when many national federations were formed.

In 1964, the International Trampoline Federation (FIT) was formed with 7 founder member federations. There are at present 42 member federations.

Championship activity has developed and grown continuously year after year. Annual World Championships were held from 1964, though since 1968 they have been held every other year, with European Championships, started in 1969, and Pan Pacific Championships, started in 1981, occurring the alternative years. European Youth Championships have been held every other year since 1972, and the introduction of the World Cup event in 1993 has seen a tremendous interest in the sport, with the television companies giving live coverage to most

events throughout the 1993-94 series. Trampolining and Tumbling have been World Games sports since 1981. Plans are well in hand for the introduction of the Asian Championships and Pan-American Championships in 1994. The World Age-Group Games, held in the same year as the World Championships attract a large entry, anything between 400-800- athletes!

In Trampolining USA athletes took many titles in the early days, though a number of nations have since shared in the top honors, especially athletes from the former Soviet Union. USA, France, and Poland are strong in Tumbling, whilst Germany, Australia and laterally, New Zealand, have shown their strength in Double-Mini Trampolining, the third of the three FIT disciplines.

Tumbling's competitive roots go back even further than that of Trampolining. It was even an Olympic Sport in 1932 when F. Wolfe, USA, was the winner. It was in 1976 that the FIT introduced Tumbling to its disciplines.

The third FIT discipline is Double-Mini Trampolining, which has only emerged as a branch of Trampolining since the mid 1970's.

The FIT has an office based in Moutier, Switzerland. To run the activity of the Federation, there is a 5 strong Presidential Committee, a 10 strong Executive, and a 7 strong Technical Committee. Recent developments have seen the introduction of both a Medical Commission and a Promotions Commission. Congresses, at which all member federations can attend, are held in conjunction with all World Championships. Elections are held every 4 years.

In 1983 the first FIT Handbook was introduced, and in 1987 the FIT News appeared, followed in 1988 by the FIT Calendar.

Source: FIT press information at World Championships 1994 in Porto/POR

## **Trampoline Training During World War II**

The trampoline industry experienced rapid growth during World War II when trampolines were successfully used in the aerial awareness training of pilots. During World War II, trampoline training was an integral part of the physical training program for United States Naval Aviation cadets. Trampoline training was among the 12 activities selected by the Navy to contribute to the overall aims and purposes of the Naval Aviation training. In the Naval Aviation program, sports were not used for their own sake or for recreational purposes. Rather, the sports embodied in this program were selected for what they contributed to the development of desirable characteristics in the aviation cadet, specifically, mental and physical conditioning.

Thousands of Naval cadets took part in trampoline training at three Naval Pre-Flight schools throughout the United States (Athens, Georgia; Iowa City, Iowa; and St. Marys, California). The Naval Aviation Physical Training Manual, issued by the Aviation Training Division of the U.S. Navy, 1944, stated the following objectives for trampoline activities:

### **To Provide Aerial Orientation**

1. Reduce fear of being upside down, of falling or revolving in midair.
2. To afford practice in relocation after body revolutions and in sensing relocation while revolving in various positions.
3. To learn balance and body control while in the air.
4. To develop oneness with the plane.
5. To acquire self-confidence in the air.

### **To Aid in Effective Conditioning**

1. Vigorous developmental exercise for the legs.

2. Muscle tension, both continuous and alternating, in the arms, shoulders, trunk and abdomen, are involved in the arm lifting and circling, and body-control movements of bouncing.
3. Muscle stretching and the alternate working of antagonistic muscles.
4. Contributes to increased vital capacity and increased fatigue-recovery ability.
5. To aid in the development of coordinated, well-timed and rhythmical movements.

U.S. Navy Lieutenant, Newt Loken, demonstrates trampoline skills to the crew members of the U.S.S. Prince William during World War II. As Fitness Director for the ship's crew, Loken convinced the Navy to include trampoline in its fitness activities. This was said to be the only trampoline in the entire Navy fleet. (from *The Naval Aviation Physical Training Manuals: Gymnastics and Tumbling*; The United States Naval Institute; 1944).

### **The USA Tramp Scene in Late 40s**

Trampoline competitions were at least partially a matter of endurance. Stunts could be, and were, repeated without penalty. It was considered better to be able to (swing) your whole routine (going from one stunt directly into the next with a (free) jump in between), and judges were called upon to evaluate not so much the form, but difficulty. This unfortunately led performers to attempt extremely (for those days) difficult tricks with little attention paid to form.

Many early judges did not really know what they were looking at, and the whole competition was fairly subjective. There was no such thing as (judging clinics) and often the performer who came from the same school or club as the judge received the highest score insofar as that judge was concerned.

The trampoline was also included as an event within college gymnastics, except that the trampolinists themselves seldom participated on other apparatus, except perhaps in tumbling, particularly since 'tumbling' is not apparatus. Actually, trampolinists had more in common with springboard divers than with competitors on the classical gymnastic apparatus, such as P-bar, H-bar, rings and side horse.

Following the war (1939-1945) trampolining became part of the US Collegiate and AAU gymnastic competition, with the champion usually being the person who did not fall off, or collapse through exhaustion bouncing up and down, for three minutes, on a solid canvas bed, usually repeating 3 or 4 stunts he knew ad infinitum, whilst simultaneously scaring hell out of the audience (both of them) and judges alike.

This is no exaggeration. I remember competing in my first National AAU championships in Cobo Hall, Detroit when one of the rules was 'your routine terminated at the moment you hit the floor'. I misjudged one stunt, but managed to grab the end rail in flight...swing under the bed...then back up again...without touching the floor, and finished the (routine). Everyone else, except one, fell off and I was awarded second place. Edsel Buchanan of Amarillo, Texas, had beaten me again!

But then came one Kurt Baechler to the Nissen Corporation in Cedar Rapids, who brought the discipline of European gymnastics to what had been the American sport and trampolining, and who introduced gymnastics form judging into competitions, whilst at the same time reducing the routine to 10 bounces. It was also Kurt who introduced such (innovations) as coaching and judging clinics.

(The following article by Frank LaDue appeared in the FIT News, April 1994)

### **How Trampoline & Mini Trampoline Came to Europe**

In 1956 a Swiss economist, Kurt Baechler, who was an accomplished gymnast at the time, was working in Los Angeles, California, when he received a telephone call from the US Olympic Committee, asking him if he would be willing to help train the US Gymnastic team for the Olympic Games in Melbourne.

Kurt then spent the next few weeks at the training centre, working with the athletes each day for 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon, whilst carrying out his professional work between and after the sessions.

It was during one of the training sessions that Kurt was introduced to George Nissen of the NISSEN CORPORATION based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They became close friends and soon afterwards George asked Kurt if he would like to work for him and his company, introducing trampolines and mini-trampolines into Europe, with the exception of the UK, where Ted Blake was already at work with Nissen.

On 3rd January 1957, Kurt flew to Cedar Rapids, set up the goals, worked out a marketing concept, and signed for Nissen. (Also working for Nissen at this time, as a promoter, was former US gymnastic champion, Frank LaDue).

Trampoline in the United States at that time was in its infancy. More emphasis was put on (difficulty) whilst (form) was totally neglected. There were no set rules, and the sport was rather dangerous to say the least.

Kurt, together with Frank LaDue worked out a basic introduction to trampolining, stressing the form in relation to gymnastics and physiology. For competition they developed a similar evaluation system as in gymnastics in order to make it simple for the gymnastic judges to judge trampolining. They also introduced the ten skills only routine at this time, working in the beginning as in gymnastics with A, B and C skills, attributing each skill with 1 point, and the total routine, provided the difficulty requirements were fulfilled, with 10 points.

It was also at this time that Kurt, under the guidance of Frank began trampoline (training) with daily sessions lasting 3 hours at a time.

The first priority in introducing trampolining as a sport was to inform, demonstrate and teach, both trampoline and mini-trampoline, as well as obtain as much information on equipment and the sport as possible. National Sports Schools, Physical Educational Departments, National Gymnastic Federations, as well as TV, Radio and the Press from throughout Europe were contacted, along with retailers, wholesalers, and gym-equipment manufacturers who might be interested in handling the equipment.

In March 1957, George Nissen, Frank LaDue and Kurt Baechler set off by air for Frankfurt, where they hired a car and set off for the US Air Force base at Wiesbaden, to pick up their equipment which had been flown in by the US Air Force. The trampoline was loaded onto the car roof rack, and they set off for their first presentation in Europe, at the famous Sportschool in Koln-Mungersdorf.

After a number of demonstrations of basic moves, i.e. twists, somersaults, etc., it was the turn of the students to try. The presentation was finished with a general discussion. The reaction could be described as moderate-enthusiastic.

For the following three weeks demonstrations were held all over Germany and Switzerland, sometimes 2-3 times each day, 7 days per week.

At the end of the tour they returned to Cedar Rapids with a multiple of notes and new ideas, amongst which was making the round mini-trampoline square.

Four months later the second tour of Europe was underway, this time with a specially adapted roof rack fitted to a Plymouth Station Wagon, which allowed for the loading and unloading of the trampoline within minutes.

Kurt's home in Gumligen, Switzerland soon became the Headquarters of the newly founded Nissen Trampoline Corp. of Switzerland. Equipment was shipped in from the States to Basel where Kurt and his team assembled the trampolines and mini-trampolines before dispatching them off to their customers.

Whilst the new company was being set up Kurt spent a great deal of time traveling between Europe and America in periods of about 3-4 months, all the time giving demonstrations and promoting the new company at the same time.

In 1957, at the Institute of PE, in the University of Freiburg, Dr. Heinz Bracklein organized the first International Trampoline Clinic. It was the same Dr. Bracklein who later influenced the elementary school programme of trampolining in Germany, and with foresight helped to improve competition rules and also help in promoting the sport of trampolining throughout Germany.

Other national clinics followed in Switzerland, Belgium, France, Italy and Holland, with the assistance of such notable gymnasts as Pierre Blois in France (the same Pierre Blois who serves

at present on both the FIT and IFSA Technical Committees), Klaas Boot (Holland), Fre de Waele (Belgium), and Figone (Italy), all former National Gymnastic Champions of their country.

The lecturing and teaching of trampolining soon began to show positive results. Soon the National Gymnastic Federations throughout Europe, plus a number of other organizations began to teach their own instructors, stressing the form and especially the safety aspect of the sport.

In 1958, after a trampoline competition in Zurich, the first international Nissen Cup was held in the town of Wasen, during the month of August, and today this event is a regular feature on the FIT international calendar with cities and villages throughout Switzerland bidding to stage this prestigious event.

During the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, Kurt made available two trampolines for the training of the divers, and it was here that the Tunisian Army Sports School based in Le Bardo made an order for 36 trampolines, which Kurt delivered personally to Tunisia shortly afterwards, and taking advantage of the visit to hold a one week clinic for the national sports teachers.

It was also in the early 60s that competitive trampolining began in earnest throughout Europe.

Demonstrations of the new sport continued throughout the early days with main sporting fixtures being targeted, especially soccer matches and gym festivals, in fact, anywhere there was a large sporting audience, like the large Nordseehalle in Keil, where Kurt, George and Frank performed in front of 15,000 spectators. The International Symposium for Physical Education, organized by Dr. Recla of the University of Graz, also included trampoline, with George and Frank demonstrating the different moves, while Kurt gave the commentary.

The German Gymnastic Federation at this time became one of the leading promoters of trampolining. It was this federation, which at the two Congresses of the FIG in Luxembourg and Copenhagen, proposed that the FIG should take the new sport under its wing. Despite a certain amount of interest amongst delegates, the Swiss FIG President rejected the proposal.

Again, it was the German Gymnastic Federation in 1964 who invited all active nations in the sport to an informal meeting to consider the formation of an International Trampoline Federation. Soon after this meeting, the Federation was founded in Basel with the then Vice-President of the Swiss Gymnastic Federation, Rene Schaerer becoming the first President of the FIT, while the German, Dr. Heinz Bracklein headed the FIT Technical Committee.

One year later, George Nissen financed the first (at that time, unofficial, but later recognized) World Championships in trampolining, organized by Ted Blake, who at that time was the then FIT Vice-President, in the famous London Theatre, the Royal Albert Hall.

It was Bob Bollinger of Rockford, Illinois who revolutionized judging of trampolining, introducing a system that is still being used today (with only a few modifications) separating the difficulty from the evaluation of the execution.

Today, the sport of trampolining is known throughout the world. The FIT has more than 40 International Federations in Membership with more seeking membership each year.

The sport owes a great deal to the hard working promoters and the many organizers from those early days, and none more so than Kurt Baechler, Frank LaDue and George Nissen, and especially George Nissen, who never gave up in his quest to bring the sport of trampolining to Europe. He not only gave his full support to Kurt and everyone else promoting the sport in Europe, but actively took part in the promotional tours himself on a great many occasions. Although he was economically interested, George Nissen did as much as anyone else for trampolining, and he showed great foresight in selecting Kurt Baechler to head his foray into Europe.

(The following article by Peter River appeared in the FIT News, April 1994)

## **The Advancement of Trampolining By Newton C. Loken Gymnastics Coach, University of Michigan**

A year ago, I predicted that trampolining would advance within the ensuing year to a point where the competitors would be doing much more than the single flips, single twists, etc., and instead would be doing doubles, back-flips, double front-flips, double twisters and small fliffuses. Now, as we review the performance of the past season, we can readily see that the prediction was too conservative. Results show that the trampoline champions did stunts of a

much higher degree of difficulty than the stunts mentioned above. Included were triple twisting back-flips, back full-fliffuses, front full-fliffuses and front flips with two and a half twists.

As a specific example of the tremendous advancement made in trampolining in the past year, let us review a routine performed by Edsel Buchanan, sophomore at the University of Michigan (1949 trampoline champion in the Western Conference Gymnastic Meet, Western Open Gymnastic Meet, National Collegiate Gymnastic Meet), executed the following routine to achieve his outstanding record of winning four major championships in one season:

A back flip with a triple twist several bounces into a front half fliffus, into a back flip into a front flip, with a one and half twist into a back flip with a double twist; three or four bounces into a back double flip into a Baroni into a back flip into a front flip with a one and a half twist into a back flip into a back flip with a double twist into a Baroni; three or four bounces into a back flip with a double twist into a front flip with a one and a half twist into a Baroni, into a back flip, into a back flip, into a back flip with a double twist into a Baroni into a back flip into a front flip with a one and a half twist, into a back flip into a back flip with a double twist, ending with a half back flip to a front drop into a full turn-table to a standing "parade rest" position.

Where to from here? That is the big question facing all of us today. It is generally accepted by trampoline coaches and performers that more difficult stunts, including the forward and backward triple somersaults, will be attempted next year. This we forecast with caution and consternation; consternation because it is felt that this activity has grown so rapidly in the last two years of college competition that it may be running away from us and that we should slow down slightly and take stock of the situation. It is feared that the trampoliners will continue to strive for more and more difficulty and the end-result may be an unfortunate accident.

We in the Big Ten Conference are hoping that more emphasis will be placed on continuity and rhythm next year. To further emphasize this objective, two rules were adopted at the May meeting of the Big Ten Gymnastic Coaches as follows: 1) There shall be only four spotters around the trampoline, during competition, and 2) if at any time the performer falls off the trampoline or is prevented from doing so by the spotters, his exercise terminates at that moment. The first rule will clean up the distracting sight of ten or more spotters kneeling around the trampoline. The second rule implies that the performer should attempt only those stunts which he is confident of completing, and it should therefore prevent his trying tricks beyond his definite capabilities. With this in mind, emphasis will be placed on three major factors: form, continuity and difficulty instead of the former heavy emphasis on difficulty alone. When trampolining reaches the stage where the contestant executes difficult stunts in a rhythm of continuous swingtime movements, the trampoline will probably be the most interesting event of the meet.

Just prior to the 1949 Western Conference Gymnastic Meet, a questionnaire was sent out to all of the Big Ten coaches requesting their opinion on how they wanted the contestants to work the trampoline - continuous or with intermediate rest periods. The majority favored the continuous routine. This was then established as the official method of working the trampoline. The judges were so informed and they judged the event accordingly.

Another very important and far-reaching rule established by the Big Ten gymnastic coaches was that concerning the bed of the trampoline. This new rule states that all of the Western Conference colleges are required to have a web bed with exerciser cable or shock-cord type attachments instead of the customary canvas and springs. This new bed will make tremendous difference in the height reached by the trampoliner. This was easily seen at the National AAU meet as the two types of trampolines were side by side and competitors on the web bed were attaining a much greater height and as a result were completing their most difficult stunts, such as a back and front full fliffus, with comparative ease.

(from the Athletic Journal, 1949)

## **History of Trampoline Competition**

In the earliest competitions, the performers were allowed a time limit of from one minute to one minute 30 seconds, and later from 45 seconds to one minute, in which to complete the competitive routine. The meets were virtually endurance contests and the routines included many intermediate bounces and almost no continuity. To encourage more continuity in the routine and to shorten the time required to administer the event, procedures were changed to allow each performer three sequences of eight contacts with the bed and 10 seconds rest between each sequence. Along with this change came the concept of continuous swing-time routines with a logical beginning and ending.

