

USA DIVING, INC.

AERIAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Project Overview

The Aerial Training Task Force was formed at the Annual Meeting in 2009 and given the responsibility of determining whether it was feasible to change our policy relating to athletes performing out of belt somersaults (including twisting somersaults) in dryland facilities on trampoline or dryboard (OBS). Hand spotting somersaults, somersaults from the ground, mini-trampoline use and other similar activities are addressed elsewhere and are beyond the scope of our project, except where they are part of a progression leading to OBS.

As in all activities in our sport, safety is the first priority. Our program cannot foresee every possible circumstance, and we cannot prescribe every action by every coach and athlete. Coaches must be mindful of their facilities, local conditions, the abilities of their athletes and how these factors play into decisions on OBS for each individual athlete.

While the risk of accidents is inherent in all athletic activities, a coach should take every step he/she can reasonably foresee to minimize risk to the athlete. When in doubt, the coach should ask him/herself “Is this risk worth jeopardizing my athlete, my program and my reputation, or is there something that should be done first before allowing my athlete to perform OBS?”

This program will give the coach a general list of things to consider. It is up to each individual coach to carefully weigh all the factors involved, including those set forth below and others which may be only locally applicable, before allowing any athlete to perform OBS.

Phase 1.

The first issue to be determined was how such a change in policy might be affected by our existing publications, policies and the state of the law relating to changing standards of care. This part of the project consisted of nationwide research and the preparation of a legal memorandum addressing two core issues: whether our existing publications and policies had established a standard of care and, if so, whether and how it could be changed without unduly exposing USA Diving, Inc. to claims by any members who might be injured while performing OBS.

We determined that USA Diving had probably established a generalized standard of care proscribing OBS, applicable to all members of USA Diving, without regard to the levels of competence or experience of either the individual coach or athlete. We further

determined that the standard of care (if established) may be refined by narrowing the scope of the coaches and athletes to whom the change would apply, i.e., coaches with certain demonstrated credentials could permit certain athletes with demonstrated specific skills to perform OBS in appropriate facilities without unreasonably increasing the risk of injury to the athlete.

Phase 2.

Having determined that the project was feasible from the risk-analysis perspective, we divided the project into 3 parts: 1) Facility and Equipment; 2) Coach Identification; and 3) Athlete Identification.

Facility and Equipment

The following general principals would apply to any dryland training facility, including those with only a dryboard, only a trampoline or those with multiple boards and trampolines:

- A. The equipment and its installation are consistent with the provisions of the USA Diving Safety Training Manual, second ed., Parts 5 – 8 (1999).¹
- B. The equipment is inspected regularly and maintained in safe operating condition.
- C. The facility is constructed and maintained according to applicable building codes and has adequate lighting, ventilation and other conditions allowing normal use for dryland training activities.
- D. The facility has adequate clearances in all directions for the safe use of dryland equipment.
- E. The coach is a coach member of USA Diving and all athletes are USA Diving members before any program athlete performs OBS.

Equipment specifications should generally be goal oriented and not tied to particular dimensions unless otherwise noted. There are many ways to accomplish given safety objectives and we do not feel that USA Diving can anticipate every local situation or conceive of every way safety can be achieved under local conditions.

The equipment-related safety concerns with OSB on trampoline include the following:

- A. The athlete over or under rotates, lands out-of-balance and “runs” trying to regain balance. Some device must exist to accommodate such an event, such as the use of end decks, nets, padding and other devices. Specific dimensions and load bearing capacities need to be developed as recommendations.
- B. The athlete lands out of balance side-ways, and tries to regain balance or jumps to the side. Some device must exist to accommodate sideways motion by an athlete off the bed of the trampoline, similar to those in §A above.

¹ For Dryland Facilities intended to be used by senior international level athletes, FINA is compiling a list of specifications for both trampoline and dryboard use.

The equipment-related safety concerns with OBS on dryboard include the following:

- A. The athlete's trajectory is improper and the athlete strikes the board. Some device may be advisable for athletes first performing single OBS from dryboard, such as a simple pad on the end of the board. However, adequate athlete preparation may make this less of a concern.
- B. The athlete under-rotates or over-rotates and "runs" back (or sideways), falling off the pad onto the board or floor. Adequate padding under and around the board and landing pad, restraining devices, end or side decks² or sufficient spotters around the landing pad are examples of devices which may minimize risk.

In all applications, coaches need to be mindful that an adequate safety system for one athlete may not be adequate for another. A coach whose athletes are primarily elementary age children should not assume the safety devices in place are adequate for a high school or college age diver. Coaches should be aware that they should discriminate among athletes who may and may not perform OBS based on all appropriate criteria, such as the capacity of safety elements in place, and the age, weight, height, experience level and other characteristics of individual athletes, and the experience of the coach.

Coach Identification

The identification of coaches with authority to permit their athletes to perform OBS will be at least a two (2) stage process. As noted above, only USA Diving Safety Certified Coaches will be considered. There is a wide variation in the coaching skill and competence of coaches within our organization, ranging from beginner coaches who may have previously only dived in high school (or not at all) to coaches with Olympic and world level experience.

We have developed a system to identify those coaches who have demonstrated objective qualifications sufficient for OBS selection meeting these criteria:

- A. It is sufficiently detailed so as to provide a reasonable assessment of the coach's ability to both coach the athlete through the skill progressions necessary and to discern when an athlete is ready for OBS
- B. It is user-friendly and accessible.
- C. It is documentable, i.e., USA Diving and each coach must be able to show in written form that a coach has demonstrated the skills appropriate for certification.

Athlete Identification

The identification of athletes for OBS is divided into two (2) parts: Physical Readiness and Skill Readiness.

Physical Readiness includes:

² End Deck dimensions from other organizations indicate a length of 10' are adequate, hand rails may be required as well at the edge of the decks. Pad thickness varies from 1" to 8", depending on location and type. Side Decks or other restraints may also be needed, depending on the type of equipment in place.

- medical evaluation, with annual screenings and clearance to participate in our sport;
- strength readiness, including strength, power, balance, flexibility, endurance, cardio-respiratory endurance, body composition, weight and general health on the day of OBS execution;
- mental readiness – is the athlete ready to perform the OBS skill in his/her mind; can the athlete manage stress, control anxiety, concentrate and ignore distractions, relax when appropriate, use imagery skills and self-discipline, respond adequately to coaching, and control fear.

Skill Readiness refers to the progressive skills an athlete must learn, successfully demonstrate and be confident in their execution before attempting OBS. This includes adequate preparation of the coach through the certification program that accompanies the program. Coaches and athletes should also be mindful of their own limitations depending on the OBS skills to be performed – i.e. the skill progressions for 202c OBS are certainly different than the skill progressions for a 304b OBS, and twisters add yet another dimension.

Documentation

Documentation is critical to the success of this program. We have prescribed in great detail the facility requirements, athlete readiness criteria and coach qualification elements. A coach must document that the requirements for OBS are met in order for the program to accomplish its goal of providing OBS opportunities for our athletes.

William H. Walker, Chair