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Why background screening?

USA Gymnastics is a youth sports organization, and gymnastics is one of the country's most popular sports, especially for girls and young women. Providing a safe, clean, and fun environment is important for the sport to continue to grow and thrive. Parents must have the highest degree of confidence that their children are not only receiving good care and proper instruction, but also are safe from negative and improper conduct. These basic tenets are crucial to maintaining a positive image in the community and a good reputation, both in local communities and as an activity nationwide, especially since 98 percent of our athlete members are under 18 years of age.

Professional membership in USA Gymnastics should be the gold standard, an indicator that the person or organization has committed the time, interest and hard work into being the best they can be. This membership should be a distinction that parents look for and depend upon to know that they are placing their children into well-trained and professional hands.

The responsibilities of an organization that provides activities for children and young adults include protecting the safety and welfare of its athletes and participants. USA Gymnastics has already mandated a safety certification program, which provides professional members with a working knowledge of how to conduct gymnastics activities in a safe environment. Also, USA Gymnastics has a zero-tolerance policy on abuse and other inappropriate behavior with an athlete. USA Gymnastics is now requiring background screening of professional members to support this policy and in response to inquires for this service from gym club owners. Background checks are becoming commonplace with many youth organizations and institutions and are endorsed by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

In fact, USA Gymnastics will begin requiring mandatory background checks for all professional members, as well as staff and Board members, in December 2007. As a pilot program, the USA Gymnastics Board of Directors and staff already have completed background checks with our partner, the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI). Through NCSI, all professional members will have the endorsement of completing a successful background check for previous criminal behavior which may be inappropriate for contact with children. Screening covers criminal background, sex offender registry and identity verification.

USA Gymnastics has worked hard with NCSI to develop a program that is affordable, and the fees cover the costs for this service. This is not a profit center for USA Gymnastics. The monies go to and remain with NCSI.

This is going to be a major undertaking for USA Gymnastics, but this initiative is an important part of providing a safe environment for our athletes, which is the responsibility of every member.