



TIME FOR A "BREAK"

Instructors add new dimension to gymnastics classes

Breakdancing and Gymnastics have a lot in common.

If that sounds strange, then Charles Montgomery and Nathaneal Lewis would say otherwise.

As instructors at Gymnastics Beat, Inc., they've put a new spin on teaching gymnastics by incorporating their background in breakdancing.

One of the reasons Montgomery became an instructor was to provide the training to kids which he wasn't able to receive when he was in school. "If we had gymnastics in school when I was growing up, I probably could have been an Olympian," he said.

"I practiced breakdancing in my garage. It was really helpful too, because we have to do splits, side splits, back bends, shoulder flexibility, hip flexibility, lower back, upper back and neck exercises," he said. "If you think about it, it's an intense form of stretching. We're working muscles that can't even be seen."

"There are exercises that you can apply to both gymnastics and breaking," Lewis said. "For example, doing the bucket exercise in gymnastics is the same as practicing what we call the UFO in breakdancing." (Ed. Note: This exercise is performed by placing your hands on the floor and attempting to walk on them with your legs in the air in a spinning motion.)

A Chance Meeting

Sam Shima, owner of Gymnastics Beat, Inc., said he met Montgomery by chance. "He called me to ask about classes for his 4-year-old daughter," he said. "Then after talking for a little while, I found out about his background."

Montgomery's background is that he is the first breaker from Fresno to participate in worldwide contests held throughout Europe and Asia.

He has won the "Best of the Best" championship in San Jose twice and has competed in Florida, New York, Utah, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Washington. He is also one of the captains of Climax/Soul Control International, a breakdancing crew that tours regularly.

Lewis is a part of Climax/Soul Control International and is an apprentice and friend to Montgomery. He won last year's "Street Rock and Urban Combat Competition" held in Visalia, CA and is an aspiring artist as well.

"When we talked, Charles told me he could do the Thomas flare, a move that is common in breakdancing but originated in gymnastics through former Olympian Kurt Thomas," Shima said. "It was then I decided to hire him, because not everyone can do that technique perfectly. It is very hard to execute." After Montgomery was hired, Lewis followed right behind him. "It's incredible what they bring to the table. They've never had formal training, yet they have no problem executing a handstand."

More than Exercise

Both Montgomery and Lewis enjoy teaching and they continue to perfect their technique. Montgomery prides himself on performing difficult "power moves". To Montgomery, breaking is more than a pastime to him. He was always athletic, but he said sports did not give him the thrill that breakdancing does.

"My wrestling coach was always trying to get a hold of me, because he saw what I could do with my neck and back with breaking," he said. "But that's not what I wanted to do."

"My body hurts everyday but I love to do this," he said. "It's the perfect outlet to just let go. It's fun. I'd rather do this than have all the money in the world."

Lewis hopes he can take his breaking further and travel abroad like Montgomery has. "I don't want to stop," he said. "I see myself competing more in a year if I practice hard."

Montgomery's future aspirations are to complete a Kinesiology degree and Lewis is eyeing a career in graphic design and 3-D animation.

By Robert Silvas