

SPORTING LEGENDS: BART CONNOR

SPORT: GYMNASTICS

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1975 - 1988

Bart Wayne Conner (born March 28, 1958 in Chicago, Illinois) is a former American gymnast who, as a member of the gold medal-winning men's gymnastics team at the 1984 Summer Olympic Games won an individual gold on the parallel bars. Conner was also the 1979 World Champion on the parallel bars.



Conner is the only American male gymnast to have won gold medals at every level of competition, including international, national and collegiate. Conner currently owns and operates the Bart Conner Gymnastics Academy in Norman, Oklahoma along with his wife, Romanian gold medalist Nadia Comaneci. He is also a commentator for televised gymnastics events and an editor of *International Gymnast Magazine*.

Conner was also part of the 1976 and 1980 USA Olympic gymnastics teams. He won the World Cup in 1979, and the American Cup in 1976, 1980, and 1981. He has been inducted into several Halls of Fame, including those of the US Olympic Committee, USA Gymnastics, International Gymnastics, and Oklahoma Sports.

Active in sports as a child, Conner started gymnastics at the age of ten, after a school physical education coach noticed his talent. He began training with the Niles West High School team and competing in local meets, where he progressed quickly but seldom won. After a few years, he also began training and competing at the local YMCA. Conner's first significant gymnastics victory was the 1972 AAU Junior Olympics, followed soon after in 1974 by the USGF Junior National Championships. Immediately following his high school graduation in 1976, he went on to join the United States team as its youngest member at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal.

SPORTING LEGENDS: BART CONNER



Conner's success at L.A. '84 was the reward for many years of intense practising.

He went to elementary school at Park View School in Morton Grove, Illinois, and attended Nilus West High School in Skokie, Illinois. When he went to Park View, his trainer made him walk to and from class on his hands. He was on the gymnastics team at Nilus West, where he set records that haven't been broken to this day.

Conner attended the University of Oklahoma in order to work with coach Paul Ziert on the gymnastics team, which was then ranked 19th nationally by the NCAA. According to Ziert, Conner is relatively unsuited physically for gymnastics due to his relative lack of spinal flexibility, and his weakness in tumbling skills.

However, Ziert continues, Conner's motivation and dedication to the sport combined with his other physical abilities helped him quickly advance to the world-class level. In 1979, he won the parallel bars event at the World Championships with an original move called the "Conner Spin." In this move, the gymnast performs a complete 360-degree turn on one bar in a straddled position, and then presses to a handstand.

Conner was the first qualifier for the 1980 Olympic gymnastics team, and did not support the US boycott of the Games. He made several media appearances in which he described the boycott as "futile," and protested the Olympics being used for political purposes. However, due to a torn biceps he received during the Olympic Trials, it is unlikely he would have performed well had he competed. Because he continued training after this injury, his recovery lasted well over a year.

In December 1983, competing at the Chunichi Cup, Conner tore his left biceps during his rings routine. Due to several bone chips floating around his elbow, his arm mobility was limited, which placed undue stress on the muscles of the upper arm during the strenuous activities of competitive gymnastics.

SPORTING LEGENDS: BART CONNER



Bart Conner was a genius on the Parallel Bars.

Following surgery and intensive physical therapy, Bart squeaked onto the 1984 Olympic team, after competing in only one of the two qualifying events, the Olympic Trials. He had begun competing in the earlier National Championships, but several serious falters, including a headfirst landing on the floor exercise, made it clear that he had not yet made a full recovery. Conner was granted a petition by the USGF to consider only the Trials scores, with which he was selected for the team.

After intense training to return to the level of competition he had reached before his injury, Conner's consistently good scores (including a perfect 10 on the parallel bars) helped the US men's team earn its first team gold. Conner took sixth place in the individual all-around competition, with his total separated from gold medalist Koji Gushiken by .35 points.

He qualified for two individual event finals, on floor exercise and parallel bars. He had a lackluster floor exercise, scoring a 9.75 for fifth place. In the parallel bars final just hours later, he scored a perfect 10 to win the event.

Conner and Nadia Comaneci were engaged on November 12, 1994, (Nadia's 33rd birthday), and married on April 27, 1996 in Bucharest, Romania. The couple first met at the 1976 American Cup, where Conner won the men's, and Comaneci the women's title. They reconnected in 1991, when Comaneci fled Romania. They currently own the Bart Conner Gymnastics Academy, Perfect 10 Production Company, and several sports equipment shops, and are editors of *International Gymnast* magazine. They also are heavily involved in charity work. Conner is also a gymnastics commentator, and accepts speaking engagements.

In 1997 Conner was inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame.

SPORTING LEGENDS: BART CONNER



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Certain athletes are often defined by one competition which becomes their finest sporting moment.

For Bart Conner, his moment most definitely came during L.A. 84, when he scored a Perfect 10 on the Parallel Bars.

Scoring a Perfect 10 doesn't happen very often, least of all during the intense pressure of Olympic Finals.

Yet Conner achieved this TWICE - during both the individual and team competition, demonstrating a remarkable level of consistency and mental strength.



Bart Conner: tagged by the U.S. sports media as the "All-American Boy" of Gymnastics.