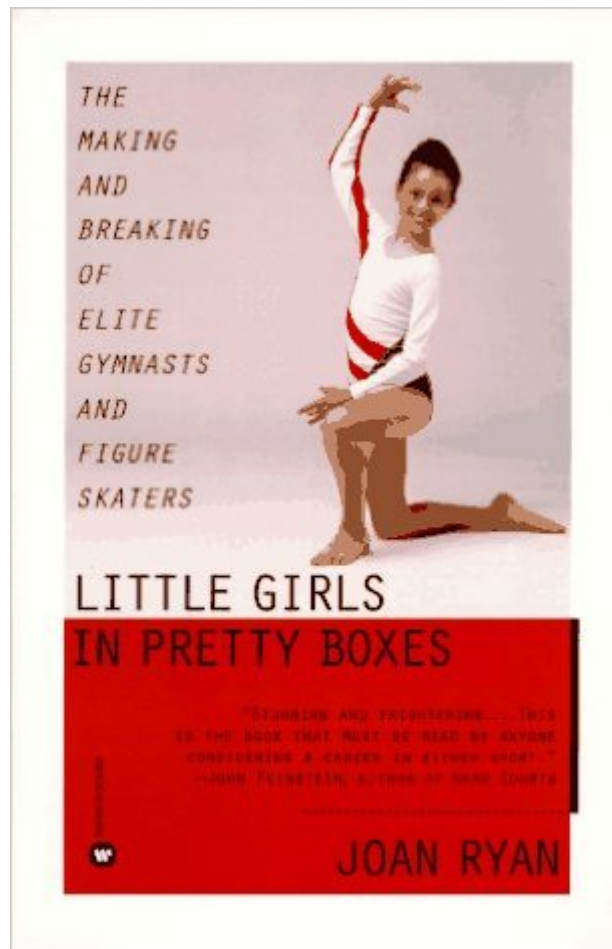


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# Little Girls In Pretty Boxes: The Making And Breaking Of Elite Gymnasts And Figure Skaters



## Synopsis

In this disturbing book, sports columnist Ryan exposes the tarnish beneath Olympic gold as she reveals heartbreaking stories of the physical and psychological abuse suffered by countless young girls driven to achieve Olympic medals. In harrowing detail, Ryan documents the preponderance of abuse, eating disorders, weakened bones, and damaged psyches that are often the result of intensive training. 16-page photo insert.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Prior to 1972, gymnastics was a rather ho-hum sport that appeared to be dominated by eastern European robots with as much appeal as wind-up toys. Especially in the Olympics, the big draws were swimming and track, with gymnastics coverage relegated to the back of the sports pages. But at the Munich Olympics in 1972, among the Russian gymnasts was a tiny 17 year old sprite named Olga Korbut who looked like an elf dangling from a charm bracelet and wowed the crowds in the gym, changing the face of gymnastics overnight. Never mind that Korbut wasn't the best gymnast on the Russian team; she was a natural showgirl. The crowds ate her up. Olga's size (84 pounds) didn't hurt her appeal either. There was a new face on female gymnastics and it was cute, petite, and above all, thin. This was reinforced four years later at Montreal by Nadia Comaneci, who was not only petite, she was barely 14 years old. Combining a formidable talent with an insatiable coach, Nadia tore up the gym to win three gold medals. The formula for a winning gymnast was thus established: take them as young as possible, feed them as little as possible, and train them as hard as possible. Some girls thrived under this regime; many more cracked (or cracked up). Ryan goes to convincing lengths in describing the results of this training on bodies that were for the most part far

too young to handle it: eating disorders (including at least one death from anorexia); severe injuries, including permanent paralysis; and damaged psyches from dealing with demanding coaches and obsessed parents who live vicariously through their children. She also points up that many coaches do not have the requisite training and experience to coach children without subjecting them to serious physical and emotional harm.

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