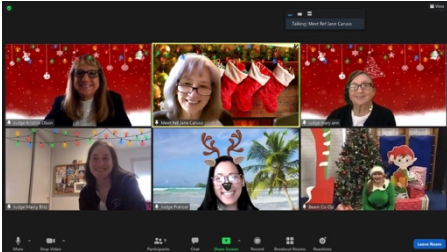


Gymnastics Judging during the Pandemic 2020-2022

At the NAWGJ National Symposium, July 2023, judges shared some of their experiences of judging during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The following shared memories show how their experiences, struggles, frustrations, and heart aches during the Pandemic created stronger creativity, resilience, joy, perspective and a greater appreciation for our involvement with the wonderful sport of gymnastics.



Sharing Memories...

COVID meet...I had come down with Covid. There was no replacement. The meet director set it up so I could judge virtually. I napped between the sessions and the Chief Judge would call me when it was time to start again. It worked! V. tucker, New York



The first year it shut down in March we had completed most of the season. The next year, many judges in Vermont had one or two judges in house meets that were small and quick. The virtual meets were nice to see everyone. Vermont

I had COVID three times. Two times was mild and one was severe. My husband had it also and was hospitalized for a week. It also closed my gym for four months. Karma White

COVID- I was the rebel...I wouldn't take the vaccinations as my doctor highly recommended not to. Our overriding thought; it's not cancer. Texas still held meets and we did have the mask mandate but our gymnasts were able to still work out and compete. Marilyn Blilie, Texas



COVID was the only year I did not judge since starting when I was 16. I ended up with



thyroid cancer during this time and although treatment was very straight forward and fairly simple, I avoided large groups of people. I don't feel it was a total loss though. It was great that it gave everyone a push toward Zoom clinics which is a much cheaper way to continue to learn. Brianne Rauzi, Wyoming

This is the day the pandemic shut down our gymnastic meet at the Luau in Leos meet in Sandusky, Ohio. We had all checked in and didn't want to go home so we stayed up all night together! Waiting to see what the next day was going to bring let alone the next year! Tina Synder, Ohio

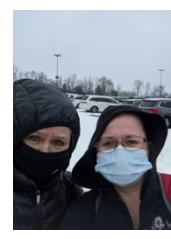


Because we missed our NORCAL judging community, we hosted numerous Zoom “Pajama” parties, dress up socials, workout jams, and casual get-togethers to keep in touch on a professional and personal level! Northern California NAWGJ

I was judging beam. The meet workers sprayed the mats after each session. When I got home, I noticed pink spots all over my blue pants. I had been “cloroxed”!

My Pandemic memory is helping to coordinate and carry out competitions on Zoom, then local invites and State meets! Our judges, coaches and clubs came together for the kids and sport. Never give up! Anne Foster, Virginia

My memory is making and prepping our own food and the smell of constant hand sanitizer. Mariya Balakireva, Minnesota



Mastering Zoom Judging-Greatest accomplishment was not losing the gymnast in the Shadows! Peggy Bialla, Virginia

I miss my mask! In my personal situation, I was isolated for many months. Our finances were impacted in a way but we had a surplus so we faired very well. Began Zoom board meetings!

I got COVID two days before a meet I was supposed to work both Saturday and Sunday. Rachel Timperman, Missouri

We did Judges Cup as online judging. We had a very hard time getting enough judges that were willing to judge online.

I became a judge during the pandemic in Missouri! I had to film a lot of virtual competitions for the kids I coached which was a difficult and lengthy process! Victoria LeMunyon, New Jersey





My most lasting memory of COVID is when meets started up again, how HAPPY everyone was just to be there. So grateful to be doing what we love again; gymnasts, coaches, judges full of joy to just be around each other again. Julie Andrews, Northern California NAWGJ



Judges' tables were partitioned off from gymnasts. Gymnasts brought their own chalk boxes and had their own sections by teams. CDC rules constantly changing regarding close contacts and when to quarantine. Natalie Koga, Arizona

I remember the first few meets we judged we were getting used to the space requirements, the sterilization of equipment, the wearing of masks and thinking we couldn't handle the masks on our faces all day long. We got used to it and even learned that we liked the masks because we didn't have to worry about our facial expressions when judging! I was so impressed with the gymnasts, masked up, competing with all their hearts. It was a crazy time! Gina Fuller, Missouri

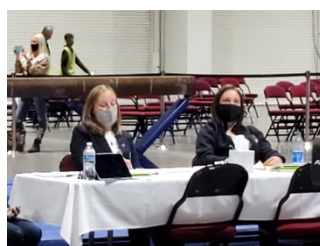


One of my monthly "outings" during COVID was to get eggs from my good friend Kathy Boechman. We loved going to see her. Unfortunately, she got COVID and passed away. Rest in Peace sweet Kathy. Brittney Shaw

Judging during the COVID pandemic- Zoom judging floor was difficult for angles and distance. Fogging up my glasses wearing a mask. Lands End printed "NAWGJ" and logo upside down on masks ☺. Pattie Walkabout, Hawaii

I judged one meet in a mask and decided that I would not put myself through that nor subject myself to watching little girls in masks. I did not judge for two years because I did not want to put more work on the shoulders of my assigner if I had to pull off a meet due to "COVID" rules.

Positive result- Instead of our annual Judges' Cup in order to limit contact, we introduced the Judges "To Go" Cup. Two or three judges went to individual gyms to evaluate and critique routines or provide mobility scores. It was successful and we continue it today. It was Dawn Messer's idea!



2021 State Meets: No spectators allowed, only gymnasts, coaches. Parents watched on Zoom. Some even tailgated in the parking lot. Cori Tamborella, Louisiana

Wearing masks 24/7 made it easy to talk to your judging partner without anyone knowing which became a difficult habit to break once the mask mandates were lifted. ☺ Alex Hammond, Nevada

Judging a virtual meet on floor and they were using a Fish eye lens! Connecticut

It was very difficult to follow all the different counties rules and regulations as the assignor/SJD. It was also very difficult to be one of the last states to not have any lock down and making requirements. Patty Ames, Washington.

Pandemic memories: My scared/confused facial expressions went unnoticed! I could not hear my partners scores because of masks. I wondered how these kids were doing gymnastics with a mask. Jeanine Henneford, Montana

It was hard to adjust to wearing a mask and glasses fogging up. Testing positive at a SLC College meet, retested to find out the first test was incorrect...stressful. Priscilla Hickey, Washington



I came home from a state meet with COVID. It was just hard wearing a mask all day. I did like single rooms! Rita Heisler, New York

During COVID, we created a hybrid competition which allowed gymnasts to compete in their gyms or at our gym. So as a judge, you could judge a gymnast live and five minutes later you could be judging a gymnast virtually. We had volunteers that held up unique gymnastic characters on the award podium for their virtual friend! It made it fun and put smiles on everyone's faces and allowed athletes to not miss a season. Massachusetts



Zoom judging had lots of glitches with videos. We had small sessions with few athletes and no spectators. Debbie Anderson, Oregon

2020 Louisiana State Meet was canceled. This upset club owners and gymnasts. Susie Moyal, Louisiana

It's very helpful now to have Zoom trainings (no travel, budget, specific content). Laurie Chadwick, Washington

I think we really learned a lot. The positive side I liked was that we had "Judges Cup to Go"! Separate gyms and separate teams- alone. It was fun and personal. Judges loved it and we are continuing to do our "Connecticut Judges Cup to Go". Connecticut

I was in my 2nd season of judging ever, and getting to judge was such a good way to stay with the sport and be involved. Claire Lynn, Missouri

Memories: In house meets only and the smell of Scrubbing Bubbles. Nadine, Alaska





Pandemic memories: I became proficient in Zoom, break out rooms, liked the benefits of multiple computer screens. Flexibility- power outage then no problem, send us the video via text and we can judge it! We lost some good friends. Judging in sweat pants but looked great from the waist up! Being able to do laundry between sessions and have dinner with my family.



Memories: I was permitted to drive to properties (I am in Property Management) seeing six lane highways at rush hour and no one was on the road. Having lines form at the end of my driveway for eggs (I raise chickens). Very sad memorial services for maintenance men who died of COVID. Mask Collections. Maryland

I had the opportunity to judge via Zoom for the first time and judge gymnasts from across the country!

Zoom meets with clubs across the country.

PA posted messages to the gym community pictures of judges sending love to our gymnasts.

A local gym had hybrid meets and there were in person gymnasts from our state (Rhode Island) competing with online gymnasts in Alaska.

I learned years ago that parents watch the judges during their child's performance. They can read lips very well. With the mask on, they could not tell what the judges were saying! Jeanne de Keyserling, New York



Pandemic Impact on College: 2020: Season cancelled the second week in March – any dual meets, Conference meets (all), USAG Nationals, NCAA Regionals and Nationals were canceled. Some judges were at the airport when their meets were canceled. 2021: New rules for those judges for college meets in terms of vaccinations. Some judges who were not vaccinated were not allowed to judge. Some meets tested judges at the meet. Conference meets and NCAA Regionals required testing prior to leaving home and two different days at the meet. One Regional had a broken machine and they quarantined about twenty judges until they had a different machine. Twenty colleges cancelled their seasons impacting judge's opportunities. Lois Colburn, Massachusetts



Memories: Boxed meals, being told to move further apart at the judging table, trying to flash scores to Chief judge with whiteboards instead of talking, A meet had no spectators so instead they had a parent's viewing room with an open bar and parents got a little wild. Leah Mohtes-Chan, Washington

Memories: Great improvements in online collaboration and training. Kind of nice judging in masks; we had to go back to watching our expressions. Definitely improved collaboration between coaches and judges.

Missouri NAWGJ- Things that happened during the pandemic:

- State meets that were supposed to be held in March of 2020 all got canceled. The first was canceled days before it was supposed to happen.
- For the 2020-2021 season Judges comfort levels with COVID varied greatly. Some didn't judge, some wore masks, some weren't as worried. Once vaccines were released, meets seemed to go somewhat back to normal, but with several waves of covid outbreaks, making assigning difficult once again.
- In 2020 we hosted a series of small in-gym critiques in place of a traditional judges cup. While this felt successful at the time, we definitely saw a financial impact of missing this major fundraiser.
- For the 2020-2021 season we sent 10 for 10 forms out to judges while assigning to help judges make informed decisions about if they wanted to accept meets with recognized health risks.
- For 2021 state and regional meets, we tried to keep previous assignments as much as possible for judges who missed out on judging the previous year. The gyms hosting the state meets also remained the same, with the hope of recouping some of the costs they lost in 2020.
- Our board transitioned from in-person or phone call meetings to Zoom meetings.

Brea Dumbacher, Missouri



Judging 9/10 Regionals with a two-judge panel. It was high pressure with no room for mistakes!

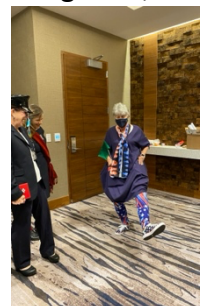
It brought the state together. The Ozone meet was moved to a couple gyms so it could run. Any gym that didn't want to participate was given credit or refund. Flexibility and cooperation at its best. Tennessee

I actually enjoyed wearing a mask because no one was able to see my facial expressions when judging questionable routines.

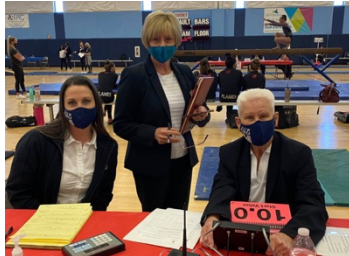
Trying to recover from COVID so I could get back to judging! Lisa Horn, Missouri

Arriving at a major meet the night before and the meet was cancelled...super disappointing but the beginning of months of cancellations. At the lower levels of "newbies" it was great to have a mask! Harder to identify laughter! Judy Dobransky, Louisiana

Memories: Con- Many folks were scared of the unknown. Many took ill and some died. Pro- If you could rationalize a pro in this situation for my husband and I... we spent a HUGE amount of quality time together, drank a LOT of wine, took TIME to plan and build a huge new workshop for him. He now had time to work at the things that pleased him since we couldn't work making money! Time is precious- cherish every day and make it count! Jan Eyman, Texas



Virtual meets were a fun way to keep judging. It was nice to talk to other judges and coaches in the breakout rooms. I was able to see clubs all across the country. It was also nice to do laundry and other chores between sessions! Pam Gardin, New Jersey



I have judged with Jim Burton many times and he is gifted with British Humor. I needed to work on staying calm with no face expression when judging with him. But with the mask on, I could smile and laugh with ease since the audience couldn't see. Jeanne de Keyserling, New York

Helping set up a State meet, Governor declares everything is shut down for the next two weeks. Proceeding to tear down State meet and Monday morning pivoting to coaching, judging and teaching two-year-old preschool on Zoom. It was fun and a good challenge at first and then it became difficult and depressing, only to again change. We learned to appreciate flexibility.

Once Jane Caruso taught us how to navigate computers and in gym video, judging virtually during the pandemic was a piece of cake and actually fun (except for FX way over in the far corners)! Holly Szabo, Massachusetts

COVID changed so many things in our lives, but the one thing I appreciate about the gymnastics community is there is a sense of family. Even though the world shut down, we still found a way to stay connected. Stacie Beckwith



COVID memory- Making sure we smiled with our eyes because we were wearing masks. BBC

Memories: Virtual judging all meets. The longest I have gone since the age of five of not being in a gym. I was going through withdrawals. Kelly Shane, New Mexico



March 12, 2000 – I was arriving to State meet. I pulled in to town and got a call. The meet is canceled. I though COVID was not a big deal. Earlier in the day I had lunch with a friend. I gave her a 4-pack of toilet paper as a gag. It wasn't very long before I wished I had kept that TP for my family!

COVID April 14, 2020- My birthday. My children had not seen me for a month. They arranged a parade of 70 cars, friends, judges, coaches, former gymnasts to parade past my house. Wonderful gifts of bottles of wine handed out of windows. Best Day Ever!

Because SO CAL was completely shut down, we moved meetings to Zoom. Theresa Barnard and I got matching llama pajamas to wear as our official COVID SJD uniform while on Zoom meetings. April Brandon, Southern California



Judging with our tables apart and/or plexiglass between us made it difficult to communicate. We had to use notes and learn new methods to communicate our scores. You didn't need to worry about facial expressions. We all had masks on. Many varieties of masks were fun. Pat Bryant, Utah



Difficulties: Limiting parents to attend competitions. Stress for children wearing masks to compete. Limited interaction for the kids and coaches. Loss of athletes to go to Nationals, etc. Jim Burton, New York

The only real negative result from COVID was not getting to judge NCAA Nationals. I hope to get back. Judging virtually was fun. I had one meet with 3.5 hours between rotation 3 and 4. Danielle Baxter, New Hampshire

I took over as SJD during COVID. I drove three hours with my kids in the car to the former DJD (Jeanelle Buseman) farm to collect all the records from her garage. It was the first time I was around someone not in my family during the pandemic. Chrissy Ervasti, Iowa

Judging a virtual meet felt great to have something to do! Robin Ruegg, Minnesota

Pennsylvania

- In the Spring of 2021 Region 7 held our Xcel Regional Meet virtually via Zoom. I was assigned to judge with Barb Cutillo who lives about an hour from me. We decided since it was supposed to be a nice day that we would get together at her house for this meet and setup our devices out on her deck. (This was one of the nice things about judging virtually - you could do it from anywhere!) As we were setting up we were getting a bit of a glare from the sun so Barb opened her retractable awning so we could better see our screens. The first session went beautifully and we had the privilege of judging some wonderful gymnasts. As we were starting the second session it started to rain a bit, but no worries, it was still a lovely spring day and the awning kept us dry. About half way into the session it started to get a bit breezier, and the next thing I knew Barb's awning started to retract on its own accord. Luckily the next gymnast was waiting for us to salute her (and was NOT in the middle of a routine!), so we asked her coach to have her wait a moment and quickly grabbed ALL our devices (2 laptops for watching routines, 2 iPads for entering score, and 2 phones in case we needed to be reached by the meet referee) so they wouldn't get wet. Lesson learned - there ARE rain delays in gymnastics too!!! We proceeded to judge the remainder of the meet from Barb's living room.

- Although virtual judging wasn't perfect, it certainly gave some gymnasts a chance to have a season when they wouldn't have had one at all. And just like anything else, you do your best to make the most of any situation. There was one team I judged a few times during the 2020-2021 season that kept asking who the head judge was on whatever event I was judging that day. I wasn't quite sure why it was so crucial initially (we were just going to tell the coach when we were ready for the next athlete), but what I learned later is that this particular gym was projecting the Zoom screen onto a wall in their gym and pinning the head judge so that when she (or he) raised their hand it felt to the athlete like the judge was in the gym too. I LOVED the creativity and willingness to make this feel as much like a "normal" situation as possible for these athletes by that coaching staff.



*Virtual judging gave us the opportunity to both judge athletes from all over the country and also judge with other officials regardless of where they were located. One of the meets I helped assign that season had a judge pull off the day before, and while I am located in Pennsylvania the same as the host club for this particular competition, I was able to pull in two judging colleagues from Colorado when I couldn't get anyone else locally to replace this judge for the days she was originally assigned.

- As part of the Region that helped get virtual judging off the ground, it was fun to watch as the 2020-2021 season progressed how much we learned and improved upon each week. To see where virtual judging started and where it finished at the end of that season was impressive, and spoke to the flexibility, ingenuity, and teamwork of all involved.

- As SJD at the time, and in a state with many virtual meets, we spent countless hours on Zoom with both (1) meet directors to make sure they knew what they needed to know to make the meet happen virtually (i.e. setting up breakout rooms, the flow of how things worked, etc), and share with them what information we had learned to make things run smoothly and (2) judges to make sure they had the proper training to be able to run Zoom and scoring systems remotely. Even if they were familiar with Zoom there were certain features specifically related to judging that they needed to know. We had some judges that would only judge in person that year, some that would only judge virtually, and some that would do either. If a scheduled in-person meet converted over to virtual, we would give the judges assigned the option of staying on or coming off and then make replacements as necessary. Marcy Blitz, Pennsylvania

