

Threshold of pain is reached. Who is going to stop it ...?



Eckhard Herholz
* GYMmedia

International competition rhythm in modern artistic gymnastics

Thoughts, experimental ideas, suggestions

- by **Eckhard Herholz**, GYMmedia INTERNATIONAL, Berlin Germany

* In the new millennium alone, since the Olympic Games in Sydney (2000) the International Gymnastics Federation F.I.G. will have held **8 (!)** World Championships until the Olympic Games 2010 in London. That means in this decade alone we had c. **100 (!)** title holders resp. World Champions in the all-around and on the apparatus!

* In the same period of time the European Gymnastics Union (UEG) organises **12** continental championships each with almost **100** champions (men and women).

When you add the annual 8 – 10 World Cup- events in artistic gymnastics alone - which in the balance of this decade also comes up to the amount of **100 (!)** competitions with almost 1.000 winners per apparatus (!!!), you end up with c. 20 – 30 high-quality competition opportunities (incl. national events) for the top gymnasts (- although not every gymnast competes at every competition).

* This raises the question:

How many Champions needs the World ??

Has this incredible quantity given us a higher popularity in the media? Definitely not!

It seems to be the opposite: The amount of gymnastics events all over the World which have no real meaning has increased! (In case the income of the F.I.G. through the simple addition of TV- sales has increased, the following thoughts *almost hold an ethical dimension of an appeal towards* the responsible persons!)

Dangerous borders have been crossed already, The health risks seem incalculable

And it even gets worse when the ardour of the wish to distinguish oneself in the media dictates the competition calendar or when through national resp. club egoisms an almost unbearable burden of competitions is created for the individual athlete. This leads to excessive physical, mental or simply logistic demands.

- When the time is steadily getting less for the really necessary athletic, coordinative and technical basic training through this uncontrollable rhythm of competitions, artistic gymnastics more and more is getting a high-risk kind of sports. To conceal this by stressing the “E”- score in the Code de Pointage in most cases can’t help anymore!
- The more the “mechanism of money” dictates the quantity of competitions - and this is with all entitlement and necessity the (in most cases in gymnastics still really small) price –and a financial bonus for actually starting at a competition can’t be excluded, the more complex and uncontrollable gets the training resp. the opportunity to remain healthy. This is especially the case in countries with national team- resp. club championships. In these cases the athletes from Eastern Europe are the ones who are most in danger. They are the ones who travel frequently throughout Europe (“gymnastics legionnaires”) as they need the financial benefits. *(Whether the influence of responsible coaches helps to avert all risks from the gymnast remains doubtful. The risk lies in the “borderline” of the decisions for an individual athlete to take part in a competition!)*

Here it is really necessary to optimize the process and this should be started from the top to the bottom. The F.I.G. should initiate it and work together with the continental federations in order to work against these conditions!

This raises the following question:

- Isn’t it enough during one Olympic cycle to have at **maximum two** World Championships, with a complete and identical program, and each of them is in the year *before* (Qualification World Championships) and in the year *after* Olympic Games?
(You have to consider that the so-called “Pre-Olympics” are another important event for some countries/ athletes – because they are the last chance to qualify for the Olympic Games!)
- Aren’t **two continental championships** (European Championships and others) every two years enough?

- They could be:
 - in the spring of an Olympic year, as a last test and in order to announce the Olympic Games in the media at this last continental event before the Olympic top event, and
 - in the year *between Olympic Games, as some kind of continental set-up championships, before the next qualification- World Championships...?*

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
WORLDS <i>(Olympic qualification)</i>	Continental Championships + Olympic GAMES	WORLDS	Continental Championships	WORLDS <i>(Olympic qualification)</i>	Continental Championships + Olympic GAMES	WORLDS

- To come after an old request by the TV- media:
Experiments with different competition formats at these top events are not good for the publicity of gymnastics!
(And if then also – like it is done by the UEG – different kinds of historic counting between complete, individual or team- European Championships – come with it, even the most compliant journalist will resign and will concentrate on more clear kind of things..!)
- ...and if you look to another, historically at least equally traditional Olympic discipline, athletics, who only once in an Olympic cycle – and then in a real and lasting way – have true World Championships with heroes also for the long-term memory of the media and the public...,
....shouldn't the responsible persons for the rhythm of competitions in gymnastics have serious doubts about the system in the world of gymnastics from this point of view?

Another important topic: the current F.I.G. World Cup- mode

Shouldn't its' system be revised not only regarding the quantity (having only a certain amount of A- resp. B- tournaments) but mainly also regarding the *quality*?

This raises the following questions:

- Is it „healthy“ for athletes, audience, media, organisers, the environment etc, when per apparatus 20, sometimes much more than 30, gymnasts travel all over the World, in order to compete in hour-long qualifications which are unnoticed by most of the audience? And the result which can be expected concerning the 8 finalists is actually predictable by an estimated 80% probability. It also is dominated by the (in most cases “overaged”) specialists. This kind of ineffective continental or global gymnastics-tourism neither helps the TV- quota nor does it bring much publicity. It only is a waste of resources and a damage for the environment!
- If at a World-Cup the all-arounders, who correspond with the complex character of modern artistic gymnastics in the best way, get more and more displaced by those whose daily training takes place on one or max. two apparatus – and who are able to do this quite successfully still when they are – sorry- “advanced in years” for gymnastics, the younger all-arounders don't get the chance for an early sense of achievement. This way, the controversial specialising which also poses a health risk still dominates the gymnastics events!
(By the way, the situation is a bit different in women's artistic gymnastics. Here the amount of responsible coaches who advise their gymnasts to compete in a full all-around seems to be higher.)
- Isn't there an opportunity to integrate the all-around in the World Cup series again? The all-around has been always valued by the experts and also the media re- discovered its' show- character (as could be seen at the Champions Trophy series in Germany)?

Suggestions for World Cup events:

“Small“ and “big“ ALL-AROUND Competition

- by considering modified all-arounds resp. parts of an all-around:
That means qualifications for an apparatus final at a WC can only be reached after having competed in a so-called “small” all-around resp. in the “big” Olympic all-around.

* WORLD CUP, all-around, day 1

(Saturday, early, TV recording is possible)

Part I: Small all-around (I)

* **Men:** Competing on 3 obligatory apparatus per choice

1. floor or vault (*specific to jumps/vaults*)
2. pommel horse or parallel bars (*specific to support elements*)
3. rings or high-bar (*specific to hanging elements*)

* **Women:** Competing on 2 obligatory apparatus

1. floor or vault
2. uneven bars or beam

Ranking of the "small all-around":

- Awards ceremony (for those who won't compete again)
(incl. a small prize money by local sponsors)

--- BREAK / PAUSE ---

Part II: Big (Olympic) all-around

(Saturday afternoon, with ticket sale, in a format and at a time which is also good for the TV)

World Cup decision with the remaining apparatus of the complete all-around:

Those gymnasts continue the competition who decided to compete in a full all-around.

* **Men:** apparatus 4 – 5 - 6

* **Women:** apparatus 3 - 4

* **World Cup awards ceremony:** Olympic (big) all-around

- "larger" price money (at least in the amount of three apparatus victories) going down to at least the 10th place ("Top Ten").
- World Cup points for the all-around, at least for the Top 15
- Announcement of the WORLD CUP FINALISTS:
only four (!) per apparatus on the following second finals' day:

** WORLD CUP, apparatus finals, day 2:

(Olympic order, TV-format, at a time which is good for the TV)

PART III: APPARATUS FINALS: 10 apparatus finals (6 men / 4 women);

- **only 4 finalists per apparatus;** max. 2 participants per nation:

That means a public and diverting battle for the World Cup victory per apparatus.

(in case no gymnasts from the host nation have qualified, there will be Wildcard on their best two apparatus from the qualification the day before)

* **WORLD CUP award ceremony III** of the best four on each apparatus

- additional points on the apparatus for the World Cup ranking
- Price money / prizes for the victory and the remaining ranks

A standardized gymnastics World-ranking-list*!

The various apparatus ranking lists and their focus are mainly being ignored by the media and the public!

The reason: there are too many!

What is missing is for men and women each **one complex World-ranking system**, with a clear focus on the all-around results!

For this definitely the all-around results of the top events Olympic Games, World Championships, continental championships and national championships (!) have to set the course in a mathematic-statistical grading. And this has to be complemented by the World Cups.

With topical updates after each important event, a smart marketing and a presentation through a main sponsor of the F.I.G. a high acceptance – comparable to the tennis World ranking lists – could be expected. The media would be able to work with such kind of system.

(* GYMmedia INTERNATIONAL administrated such kind of World ranking list for many years and with a high acceptance by the public – unfortunately without the F.I.G.; A mathematic *World Ranking Key* again has been produced...!)

Thoughts!

The author of these thoughts doesn't want to presume – despite of many discussions and researches with competent representatives of international gymnastics – at all, that the above mentioned ideas should be considered as the “philosopher's stone”. They only show the necessity to revise the system of competitions in international gymnastics.

The suggestions – although they were developed under the aspects of feasibility – are still only experimental thoughts which should lead to further discussions.

A general “getting slower” in favour of quality is needed for the overall society, the humanization of life and a more economic use of resources!

Elite sports and especially the complex discipline of gymnastics can't be exempted from this!

Eckhard Herholz

Chief editor; GYMmedia INTERNATIONAL

(former coach for artistic gymnastics in GDR; long-time TV commentator)

*... *what's YOUR opinion / proposal* meaning to all these problems?

... send it to office@gymmedia.com