



Letter from the President

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By Prof. Bruno Grandi, President of the FIG

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FIG Academy in St Petersburg

A colloquium for the two Technical Committees (Men's and Women's) in St Petersburg (RUS) in March 2008 was held in the aim of regulating the standing of elected Technical Committee members in connection with the Antalya Congress, where a norm was approved requiring that **candidates running for a function within a Technical Committee hold a technical brevet** issued from the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique. The St Petersburg colloquium dealt specifically with this issue.

The first day, over which I presided, was consecrated to more formal issues. The second was led by the Vice-Presidents and centred on the re-examination and discussion of the tables of difficulties in the Codes of Points for Men's and Women's Artistic Gymnastics.

I am aware of just how complex this task is in many ways. The nature of the subject and the humanistic aspects that come into play, coupled with real life experience make this an enriching issue.

It is an important one for all of us. Through this colloquium, the FIG is pursuing a series of debates initiated some time ago, which strive toward further clarifying the Codes. The colloquium was an ideal time to cultivate genuine collaboration and to foster dialogue among those who hold the responsibility for the entire community, particularly our athletes.

Gymnastics is a sport based on two fundamental concepts: perfection and beauty. These two notions both compliment and contrast one another. Gestural perfection evokes geometry, which is quantifiable and rational. Beauty has a more arbitrary significance; it is personal, irrational. To an extent, geometric perfection in gymnastics can be quantified because it can be moulded and can assimilate physical expression. Attempting to quantify and determine the absolute value of beauty, however, falls within the scope of all that is arbitrary and purely subjective.

The universe that is judging cannot possibly be written down and expressed in absolutes through the Codes of Points. Not in the past, not in the future, not ever. Subjective judging is and will remain intimate and personal; it perceives a sense of beauty as the artistic creation of an individual. From this time forward, each judge delivers a personal evaluation.

More concretely, I would like to address the discussion concerning *Table of Difficulties*.

Educational Tool

It is our fundamental belief that the Code of Points covers a living demographic. It is important that we catalogue a wide range of heterogeneous values; these include technical and acrobatic elements on the one hand, and artistic elements on the other.

In short, the Codes of Points maintain a series of rules which are applied to human beings and, in our case, to girls and boys who are still very young.

What does this mean?

This means that the Codes need to act as a reference tool, which all athletes can adapt to their unique aptitudes and capacities. Technicians need to be able to pinpoint just what is possible and what is not for an athlete; they need to customise the Code to suit their athletes' individuality. It is



unwise to violate the innate personality of an athlete; rather the Code should be used in such a way as to capitalise on the unique capacities of individual athletes in order to satisfy the technical requirements of the Code by adapting the rules to fit the evolution of current gymnastics.

Thus, the Code is an educational and orientational tool rather than one used merely to judge.

This concept was discussed in Budapest, where technicians from every continent participated; our next meeting was in Castelfranco in the Veneto region. Today, as these discussions draw to a close, we strive to complete and edit the final definitions. A variety of studies and analyses remain to be completed with the help of biomechanical experts, and once we have achieved a level of "major" scientific certitude, these discussions will finally reach their end.

I have specified "major" because in mathematical science and mechanical physics, one refers to scientific certitudes rather than approximate values. In our case, we cannot possibly transform these parameters into coefficients of an absolute difficulty since they vary from one aspect to the next. Thus, these values are in no way definable in the absolute.

For this reason, in order to develop an index of difficulties, those figuring in the Codes of Points must possess an unequivocal scientific basis strong enough to dismiss any doubt as to their true technical value. We are talking about a handful of movements which give rise to doubt still today.

It is time to put an end to the era in which this pivotal part of the Codes was seen through either personal experience (empirical phase), or through a lens of accepted biomechanics that had never been proven. Though these traditional concepts were useful and relatively credible, based as they were on practical experience, they now need to find their footing in scientific criteria.

Personally, I feel that the large majority of elements are correctly situated in the Codes; however, it is important that we bring this empirical phase in our history to a close. While intuition is a precious commodity, too many variables contribute to the evaluation of element difficulties. Still, these variables will be taken into consideration.

The Codes of Points are an educational instrument and must be conveyed as such; they are something of a map for technicians and athletes to follow.

Educational Heritage

Basic movements attributed to defined structural groups (dynamic key movements) will be classified as such in a precise index, which may or may not be included in future editions of the Codes of Points, without decreasing their practicality. These movements will be used with a specific didactic purpose in mind within the Age Group programmes.

The more complex elements will also be defined and classified according to dynamic structure. The definition will be clear cut for some, while others may differ in their opinions.

As a general rule, the gymnastics Code of Points represents a compromise of sorts: movements will be rigidly and decisively classified in a hierarchical system. This is necessary to the evaluation of exercises. At the same time, it is possible that this will conflict with the more subjective aspects of judging; physiological, morphological and neuro-physiological predispositions will affect whether an exercise is easy or difficult for a gymnast to perform.

As a follow-up to these studies (which will also serve a statistical purpose), we will need to set a pedagogical scale with accurate average values. This scale will serve as a basis for defining the degree of movement complexity.

For this reason, studies on and research for the Codes need to hinge on real and accurate scientific criteria whenever possible.

Discussions on movements continue and create a difference of opinion.



It is evident that my aim is not to limit the Codes of Points to the mere judging of our competitions, but to give them a certain amount of juridical leverage. The Codes need to be medically and scientifically justifiable under any circumstances.

I hope to equip them with juridical leverage because the practise of gymnastics is not a haphazard and improvised one. Rather it is a learning process that embraces natural reasoning; one that must be respected and followed in order to reach an autonomous level. Above all, it must be juridical so that each athlete may appropriate a movement and adapt it accordingly.

In conclusion, the Codes of Points are an educational heritage; they are a pedagogical reference tool in which one finds ethical significance and value.

I feel that through extensive discussions, this issue has come home to its earliest definition. Movements which still lack a final definition will be discussed at a later date. It is up to the Technical Committees to fill in the remaining gaps and to resolve uncertainties.

It is for this reason that we have appealed to two Technical Committees and a group of experts who will be working together to reach our final objective. These two groups need to coexist, share information and closely examine the issues at hand in order to produce two Codes of a comprehensive nature; Codes that are not limited to competition management.

With my kind regards.

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