

# Investigation of the terms and regulations, under which the competitions of Gymnastics were held from 1920 to 1930

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## Abstract

The lack of common rules and credible judgement created particular problems in gymnastics competitions, organized by the two international sports institutions (IOC, EG), until the beginning of the World War I. After the end of the war, these institutions began to cooperate, to widen and to put under their aegis all the existing Gymnastics Federations. In the decades of 1920 and 1930 totally five International Gymnastics competitions were organized by the IGF and five Olympic Games by the IOC. Despite the considerable efforts of the two institutions for commonly accepted regulations, reliable judgment and uniform apparatuses, no solution was found. So, there were a lot of problems, since several federations were introspective and followed their own regulations and principles. This fact affected negatively the general development of gymnastics.

The purpose of this study is to research and show off the structures and characteristics of the regulations of gymnastics in the decades of 1920 and 1930 as well as the reasons that caused the lack of common rules and their effects in the development of gymnastics.

**Keywords** judgement • judges • Scoring Code • Olympic Games • international competitions • World Championship

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## Introduction

The efforts for an objective and fair judgement in the sport of gymnastics started as early as the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the sport began to be cultivated in a rudimentary competitive form (Pahncke, 1983; Borrmann, 1978). In the years that followed there were various competitive systems and regulations without being commonly accepted by all countries and federations that cultivated gymnastics (Kaimakamis, 2001).

From 1896 to 1912 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) organized Olympic Games, in which the sport of gymnastics held a primal position. At the same time that is from 1903 until 1913 the European Gymnastics Federation (EGF) organized six International Gymnastics Competitions (the subsequent World Championship) (Götze & Herholtz, 1992; Mervert, 1983).

In the schedule of the first three Olympic Games (1896-1904) there were systems and regulations exclusively according to the German gymnastic system, while in the other three (1906-1912) the Swedish gymnastic system was also used (Savvidis, 1907; Lennartz & Teutenberg, 1995; Göhler, 1980).

The founder of the German Gymnastic system was Ludwig Jahn. The German gymnastic system was based on a national, social, patriotic ideology.

The practice was done in fixed gymnastic apparatuses (horizontal bar, parallel bars, rings, vaulting horses with handles). The horizontal bar and the parallel bars were the emblem of the above system. Based on this system, a lot of athletics

clubs were established that organized shows and competitions.

The founder of the Swedish system was Pier Ling. He was firstly interested in the training of gymnasts, in order to put the correct basis of his new gymnastic movement. He did not establish gyms for trainees nor clubs as Ludwig Jahn did.

The main purpose of the Swedish gymnastic system was to increase the biological performance with dominant aim the maintaining and improvement of health. According to the purpose and the content of gymnastics, Ling divided it in four categories: military, therapeutic, aesthetic and artistic-educational-scholar gymnastics. From these ones the first two categories were spread very quickly in several countries. In this system the free gymnastic exercises held a dominant position, since the gymnasts cultivated their posture, the harmonious development of all parts of the body, the correct breathing and all the operational mechanisms of the human body. Exercises beneficial and not impressive are selected and cultivated for this purpose. The apparatuses used were portable and fixed.

There were problems in judgement and in the rules. These problems worsened particularly in the last three games, because of the entry of the Swedish gymnastic system, since its structure and philosophy was different from this of the German system. Also, the fact, that each host country had the right to draft rules in accordance with its own views, created even more confusion, since the host country tried to keep a balance among all participants, while on the other hand it applied rules in accordance with its own principles (Zschocke, 2000).

The six international competitions of gymnastics, which EGF had organized, were held exclusively in accordance with the German gymnastic system, without any special deviations in the rules and competitive systems. The number of the athletes of each team was small, six to eight people, compared to that of the Olympic Games (Götze & Herholz, 1992). The problem was not only the lack of established and commonly accepted rules, but also the lack of common dimensions and specifications of the apparatuses.

There was no cooperation between the EGF and the IGF for the organization of the gymnastics competitions, nor an exchange of opinions. A first contact between these two institutions occurred at the Olympic Games of 1908, while at those of 1912, there was a first rudimentary collaboration (Huguenin,

1981). At that time, various scoring scales were used (mostly out of 10 and 20 points), while primarily the following factors were evaluated: timing (in team performance), technique, rhythm and difficulty. In some games there was a separate evaluation of strength and swinging elements (Kaimakamis, 2001).

## Method

The research was based on primary and secondary written sources, issued by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. The books, published by the IGF itself in 1981 and 1991, were considered to be highly reliable sources, since the authors of certain books were protagonists in the facts of gymnastics, during the decades of 1920 and 1930.

The theme of the rules and the judgement in the sport of gymnastics was, in the past and still now, a difficult and complex affair. For this reason, moreover, several authors, describing the competitions of that era, refrain from commenting and analyzing the substance of the affair in detail. So in this bibliography, which is otherwise valid and reliable, there is no detailed information about the judgement and the rules. This fact created a lot of problems in collecting information. This research came to cover this gap in a great degree.

## Scoring systems and judgement in the decade of 1920

After the disastrous World War I, in 1920 the gymnastics began to be rebuilt all over the Europe and the world (Kaimakamis, 2001). In the decade of 1920, three Olympic Games were held (1920, 1924, 1928) and two International Gymnastics Competitions (1922, 1926), which, later on, were renamed in Gymnastics World Championships.

The Olympic Games of Antwerp (1920) were the first major sporting event after the World War I. The IOC that worked directly with the EGF, was confronted with the great problem of the era that was the choice of the competitive systems, the scoring system and the way of judgement.

Such competitive and scoring systems were applied in order to keep some balance and to satisfy all sides. Nevertheless, there was a problem of consensus, especially among countries that cultivated different gymnastic systems (Merert, 1983; Gajdos 1994). Eventually, the games were held in accordance with the following four competitive systems:

-A team all-around and an individual all-around competition, according to the German gymnastic system. In the first, 119 athletes participated, who competed in the horizontal bar, the parallel bars, the rings, the floor exercises and in 100 meters stipple chase. In the second, 44 athletes participated, who competed in the horizontal bar, the parallel bars, the vaulting horse with grips and the rings. In the first three apparatuses there were also compulsory programs (Kluge, 1981; Merert, 1983).

-A team all-around competition and a free system, according to the Swedish gymnastic system. In the first, 72 athletes participated, while in the second (also team competition with free exercises and apparatuses) there were 50 athletes (Prestidge, 1988; Götze & Herholz, 1992; Göhler, 1980). Despite the fact that these competitions covered the requirements of both sovereign gymnastics systems (German, Swedish), there were complaints and protests. For the fourth place in the individual all-around of the Belgian athlete Kempeneers, Göhler states that "it was a result due to the home ground and not an athletic performance" (Göhler, 1980).

In the same year (1920) Czechoslovakia organized successfully the sixth "Sokol" Rally, in which the program of women included and the balance beam.

The top score of the evaluation was 20 points, while each fall was punished with two points. In the compulsory programs of men, if athletes forgot, replaced or added some new elements, their score was zero (Blecking, 1987).

The evaluation of team gymnastics floor exercises faced a lot of problems, because there were not commonly accepted rules. The most common judgement and evaluation system, however, was the following: participation of five judges, who were divided into three groups, two, two and one. The first two judges scored the composition and the degree of difficulty of the exercises of the team, the other two the individual performance and the difficulty of individual athletes and the other one the cooperation and synchronization among athletes.

Each judge could score the top up to 20 points, while the score was coming out from each panel of judges separately. One team could get at the gymnastic exercises the maximum points, i.e.  $120 + 120 + 60 = 300$ . The biggest difference between the scores of judges of the same team was allowed to be up to 1.75 points. The duration of the program of this team performance had to be between 10 and 12

minutes of an hour, otherwise there were reductions. (Gajdos, 1995).

After the USA entry in the EGF this institution changed its name into International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), while the European Gymnastics Competitions were renamed into International Gymnastics Competitions (Kaimakamis, 2001).

### Scoring systems and judgement in the decade of 1930

In the decade of 1930 the Olympics were held twice (1932, 1936) and the World Championships three times. The 22<sup>nd</sup> IGF Assembly took place in Budapest in 1934 and it finally approved the inclusion of the powerful German Federation in the IGF (Huguenin, 1991). Along with Switzerland, Germany and several other major federations, IGF is recognized all over the world, gaining power and prestige. Nevertheless, it had not been able yet to apply reliable and of common acceptance competitive and scoring systems. In order to keep some balance, it continued to allow countries, which held the World Championship and the Olympics, to enter changes in the competitive and scoring system, according to their own desires. A typical example was that of the USA in the Olympics in Los Angeles (1932), in which the organizers introduced a lot of their own aspects and ideas (Göhler, 1980).

In 1935, an international technical Committee was constituted, including one representative from each Federation, while soon afterwards an executive committee was also constituted, including three to five members. Through these committees the IGF made, among others, the following decisions, which were implemented a little later (Huguenin, 1981, Kaimakamis, 2001):

- The twelve sport events of men were established in the six apparatuses (free and compulsory programs).
- The track and field events, which, until then, were included in all competitions, now became four, from which the athletes could choose three.
- The rope climbing was abolished from the gymnastics competitions.
- If an athlete wished to repeat the compulsory program, he could do it, but only his second attempt would be scored.
- For the gymnastics competitions, three judges were introduced in each apparatus.
- The final score came out from the average of the three scores, while the top scorings were not

allowed to have difference between them more than one point.

- For about twenty years this way of scoring, as well as the events mentioned above, had not been changed. Since the World Championship in Rome (1954), the track and field events were extinguished forever from the gymnastics competitions.

In 1936, the first official list of judges of the IGF was created, while it was decided the World Championship of 1942 to be assigned to Switzerland (Kaimakamis, 2001). Unfortunately, the World Championship in Prague (1938) was the last one that was held before the World War II.

From the early 1930's the competitive systems began to take the form of a commonly accepted total of twelve sport events. The scoring system had still a big problem, since they never actually faced the themes that arose at the competitions. There was lack of objectivity and judges' update and awareness as well as the imperfection of the rules. Sometimes, despite the decisions of the committees of the IGF, a lot of things were changed a day before the competition, under the pressure of various sides (Kaimakamis, 2001). Also, a lot of problems appeared because of the lack of common dimensions and functional specifications of the apparatuses (Huguenin, 1981).

Such problems appeared in the Olympics in Berlin (1936), since there was a confrontation between the German Federation and IGF. Eventually the system suggested by the IGF, the so-called international, was applied. It had a top score of 10 points and subdivisions of tenths. Three judges scored, evaluating the difficulty, the combination, the confidence and the image generally, while the final score of each athlete was coming out from the average of the sum of the scores of the three judges (Göhler, 1980; Pahncke 1983). The German scoring system had a top score of 20 points. Two judges scored out of 10 points each, while the score of each athlete resulted from the sum of the scores of the two judges.

The German writer Umminger (1969) informs us that "the scores of judges in the Berlin Olympics were so close to each other, so that the judges did not need nor a time to come together in order to discuss some differences". Instead, the great Slovak athlete Alois Hundec, who participated in the competition, blames judges for lack of objectivity as follows: "the judges were horrible. The most of them were Germans, who favored their compatriots. The score we got was 8 to 9 points, although we performed very well." (Gajdos, 1997).

Several problems were also created because of the judgement in women's team gymnastics exercises. At that time women performed very easy exercises and quite well in the apparatuses (Umminger, 1969; Götze & Zeume, 1989).

It should be noted that the Germans had another scoring system, which was mostly used in competitions between clubs or cities of their country. It was the system of 60 points, according to which six judges divided into three groups were scoring the athletes (Pahncke, 1983). The two of them were scoring the difficulty, the other two the posture and the combination and the last double the image in general. So, for a performance there were three scores out of 20 points each. Then the Secretariat added the three scores of the three doubles, so the sum was the final score of the athlete ( $20 + 20 + 20 = 60$  points).

## Conclusions

- The lack of common rules and reliable judgement in the sport of gymnastics created particular problems in the competitions organized by the two international sports institutions (IOC, EGF) until the beginning of World War I.
- After the World War I, these institutions began to cooperate, to widen and to put under their aegis all the known Gymnastics Federations.
- Despite their development and the fact that they tried to include all the gymnastic systems in the competitions, there was still a big problem, because of the lack of commonly accepted rules and reliable judges.
- The scoring systems applied were out of 10 and 20 points, while two, three and five judges were used in each apparatus. In the beginning, the final score came out of the sum, then from the average and finally from the average of the intermediate scores.
- Big problems occurred in the evaluation of the team gymnastics exercises. The most common scoring system was that of five judges, who were divided into three groups.
- From the early 1930, a uniform competitive system was established, which had a direct impact on the judgment.
- Despite the decisions of the IGF, a lot of times some federations did not want to comply, so they followed their own way and departed from the competitions.
- Overall, the lack of a common and accepted scoring system affected negatively the

development of gymnastics in the decades of 1920 and 1930.

### Abbreviations

**EGF** =European Gymnastics Federation  
**IOC**= International Olympic Committee  
**IGF**= International Gymnastics Federation

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