

As the calendar flips to 2010, we reflect on the past 12 months of the unpredictable world of gymnastics. Here's hoping the new year will provide even more excitement.



Code of Points: The Women's Technical Committee boldly lowered the required skills from 10 to eight, while the Men's Technical Committee did not. The result? Across four events, a woman must do 24 skills and one vault, while across six events, a man must do 50 skills and one vault. Whatever happened to gender equity? Of course, as I've stated numerous times, I commend the WTC's decision. That said, I must say the women have gotten a bit severe in their execution deductions. I've always trumpeted that perfect execution should take precedence over risky difficulty, but I just can't see where some of the deductions are coming from now.

Most Popular Combination: The most common high bar combo might well be a Takemoto-Yamawaki (layout Voronin), even if the latter often morphs into whatever the gymnast must do to clear the bar and regrasp. The most common for women? Hmm. Anything to a flip-flop-layout on beam.

My New Rule: I offer the following proposal to the FIG. To reverse the trend toward marathon routines, reward those that satisfy the requirements with the fewest number of skills. Makes perfect sense to me. So in the apparatus finals, for example, a tie would be broken by the number of skills. Fewest wins. Under this rule, **Beth Tweddle** would be even harder to beat.

The American Cup Jinx: After winning the 2009 American Cup in Chicago last February, **Fabi an Hambüchen**

and

Jordyn Wieber

sort of fizzled. Hambüchen still competed for much of the year, winning the Europeans and the first two legs of the Champions Trophy, but he had to withdraw from the biggest meet of 2009: the World Championships. Late in 2009 he gamely competed in the Champions Trophy final, at less than 100%, and finished second. Wieber's chronic hamstring was aggravated early last summer at a national team training camp, which knocked her out of the U.S. championships in August.

2009 Nadia Comaneci International Invitational: The inaugural competition named after the

1976 Olympic champion scored a 10.0 for the field it drew to Oklahoma City: Clubs from Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Mexico, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan and the United States. 2008 Olympic floor champion **Sandra Izbasa** won the all-around, but later in the year tore her Achilles' tendon while preparing for worlds. Here's hoping we see Izbasa back in 2010.

Russia Returns—Briefly: The two **Ksenias**, **Semyonova** and **Afanasyeva**, went 1-2 at the Europeans in Milan in April, but were practically invisible at the worlds in October. Granted, the latter left London prior to the meet because of injury, but Semyonova, fourth all-around at the Olympics and the 2007 world champ on bars, had the worst results of the Russian women in London. For the record, Semyonova won the Europeans with 58.175, which would have been golden in London.

Swiss Peaks: Ariella Käslin continued her ascent in the Swiss record books after making the Olympic vault final. She won the event at the Europeans and placed second at worlds. Of course, much of her success comes from her ability to vault a handspring-rudi, which carries an unusually huge value in the women's Code (6.3). I predict that we'll begin to see more women attempt this vault in 2010.

Obituaries: The gymnastics world lost several notable individuals in 2009. Japanese great **Yukio Endo**

, IG founder

Glenn Sundby

, 2009 world bronze medalist

Yuri Ryazanov

. Others included

Pierre Chabloz

,

Irina Gabashvili

,

Claus Haller

,

Tom Cook

and

Levi Torkelson

.

Comebacks: While the gymnastics world awaits the possible comebacks of 2008 Olympic champion **Nastia Liukin** and all-around runner-up **Shawn Johnson**, who are holding firm on their decision to keep that option open,

Alicia Sacramone

announced her intention to return to competition in 2010. Of course, comeback promises are much easier to make than keep, especially when those old aches and pains start to return.

More Comebacks: Comebacks are not only for gymnasts. Former FIG photographer and long-time IG contributor **Eileen Langsley** began shooting a few meets in

2009, and

Dave Black, former photographer for USA Gymnastics and IG, joined the IG tour to the London World Championships. Apparently, shooting gymnastics is just like riding a bike, judging by their beautiful photos in recent IGs.

Biggest Cinderella Story: Kayla Williams, for sure. A Level 10 champion in the spring, Williams became the first American vault world champion in the fall. Regardless of what the rest of her career holds, she will always be a world champion.

U.S. Women: The world all-around gold by **Bridget Sloan** in 2009 gave the U.S. a stranglehold on that event, after **Shawn**

Johnson's

victory in 2007 and

Nastia Liukin's

Olympic triumph in 2008. With

Rebecca Bross

a close second to Sloan in London -- and no doubt having gained a huge dose of experience in the process -- look for an American to challenge for the 2010 title, as well.

Asian Domination: Considering that Japan's **Kohei Uchimura** won the world all-around title with plenty of room to spare, and

China

hogged half of the 12 golds in London, it is safe to say that Asia will be a major player in 2010.

Thank you to all who contributed to IG in 2009, and happy New Year.