

Written by Dwight Normile

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The FIG announced the qualification process for the 2012 London Olympics, which will feature five-member teams for the first time. The 2010 Rotterdam World Championships in October will reportedly be the largest ever in terms of number of participants, but only the top 24 men's and women's teams will advance to the 2011 Tokyo World Championships.

2012 Olympic qualification

The format for Tokyo will differ from past Olympic qualifiers. Instead of the top 12 teams advancing to the Olympics, only the top eight teams, plus individual apparatus medalists, will earn Olympic berths.

In January 2012, the teams that placed ninth through 16th in Tokyo will battle for the last four team berths to London. This final qualification meet will be held at London's O2 Arena, the venue of the 2009 worlds and 2012 Olympics.

Having the final qualifier at home could help Great Britain secure berths for both its men's and women's teams. Its men's team did not qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics (it placed 15th at the 2007 Stuttgart worlds), and its women's team placed ninth in Beijing.

Give these guys a break

The Rotterdam worlds, which expanded its competition schedule from seven to nine days, also

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seems to have altered the usual meet format. For years, the men's qualification rounds preceded the women's, but the schedule printed on the official Rotterdam worlds [website](#) has the women's prelims on Oct. 16 and 17, followed by the men's prelims on Oct. 18 and 19.

The women's team final is slated for Oct. 20, the men's on Oct. 21. Then it gets weird.

Both the men's and women's all-around finals are scheduled for the same day, Oct. 22, with the men's at 4 p.m. and the women's at 7:30 p.m. So much for celebrating your team victory the night before if you are an all-arounder.

I feel for any all-arounder from a top-eight team, such as Japan's **Kohei Uchimura** or Germany's **abian Hambüchen**

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Why schedule the men after the women for the prelims and team finals, only to reverse them for the all-around finals? With only four events (and eight skills counting) compared with six (10 skills) for men, it is far easier for female gymnasts to compete back-to-back all-around competitions than it is for men.

If the FIG insists on holding a world championships in every non-Olympic year, perhaps it would be wise to follow the "individual" worlds (London 2009) with a shorter, team-only format the following year. No need to decide individual world champions again. Remember, years ago the worlds were held only every four years, between the Olympics. They were a really big deal, but not so much anymore. This year the Commonwealth Games will be held in New Delhi, India, from Oct. 3-14. The gymnastics competition runs from Oct. 4-8, and podium training for the Rotterdam worlds begins Oct. 12. That's a lot to ask of the Commonwealth teams that also need to be peaking in Rotterdam.

Keatings the latest casualty

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I was saddened to hear about the ACL injury to Great Britain's **Daniel Keatings**. Saddened both for him and for what the sport will be missing in the short term. He sustained the injury shortly after the recent Birmingham Europeans. Again, the Europeans used to be a rarely contested event, but the European Gymnastics Union now holds them annually.

The open-ended Code has been in effect since 2006, and I have to believe that the longer routines for men combined with the growing frequency of competition is going to take a toll beyond our wildest nightmares.

Shawn Johnson also tore an ACL this year, but on the ski slopes. So just when you thought her gymnastics retirement had been confirmed by an injury, the opposite occurred. Apparently the setback spurred a comeback, which she announced recently. My guess is she won't be the only one. London 2012 will be here before you know it.

Bellu's back (updated)

When former Romanian head coach **Octavian Bellu** and his former assistant **Mariana Bitang** were recently asked by the Romanian Federation to help prepare the 2012 Olympic team, the sudden resignation of head coach

Nicolae Forminte

came as a surprise. The plan was not to have Bellu and Bitang move to Deva to take over, but to periodically work with Forminte to help the team. Now reports out of Romania say that Forminte might reconsider his decision to quit.