

Written by Dwight Normile
Friday, 07 January 2011 07:38



With the 2011 season still several weeks away, there is plenty of time to make a few New Year's resolutions. So I humbly offer the following list for the world of gymnastics.

Aliya Mustafina/RUS: I don't mean to be picky, and it may feel uncomfortable at first, but you will endear yourself to even more fans if you smile more often. I realize how stressful it can be to carry an entire team on your back, but that pressure should subside this year.

Kohei Uchimura/JPN: The sport has rarely seen someone of your technical brilliance and attention to detail. When I look through countless photos of you for stories in IG, I simply never see your toes unpointed or legs apart. Everything is always impossibly perfect ... from the neck down, that is. Kohei, please get a haircut. If you become the first male gymnast to win a third world all-around title this year, people will want to see your whole face.

FIG Women's Technical Committee: Find a way to give Execution scores in the mid- to high-9s again. There has to be a way for technique and artistry to battle effectively against tricks and acrobatics. But right now, it's not a fair fight.

FIG Men's Technical Committee: Less is more. If you insist on retaining a 10-skill D-score, then impose a limit of 15 skills to achieve that quota. And if 15 skills are not enough to accommodate 10 value elements, then drop to eight like the women did. After all, there is only so much chalk in the world.

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FIG Executive Committee: Abolish the age limit. It has caused more negative P.R. this year than the sport can handle. Plus, we gymnastics journalists want to write tired phrases like "the team was an interesting mix of youth and experience" again.

People's Republic of Korea: Where to start? If you fudge the birth date of a gymnast, make sure she doesn't have a twin sister on the national team. Because of your oversight with Hong Su Jong's birth year(s), fans will not be able to see your other incredible gymnasts, such as male vaulter Ri Se Gwang, at the next worlds and Olympics.

Excessive Celebrators: It's a penalty in college football, and I hope judges are deducting for it in gymnastics. I don't care how well you think you performed, your routine is not officially complete until you stand erect with arms up. Respect for the sport dictates that you should then turn toward the judges and present yourself. Then, if you feel the need to applaud your own routine, knock yourself out (but only if you just did something special).

Impatient Gymnasts: Similar to the entry above, your dismount or vault landing is not complete until you stand up straight with heels together (focus forward), regardless of how many steps were necessary to achieve this position. It is a deduction to land in a squat and then quickly pivot toward the judges. It's cute when a Level 4 does it, but for an elite? Absolutely unforgivable!

Men's NCAA Gymnastics: Do whatever it takes to make every dual meet meaningful, especially the ones between David and Goliath. If that means adopting a radical new scoring system, DO IT, before it's too late.

Women's NCAA Gymnastics: Now that the overall performance level is higher than 10 years ago, start rewarding for a little extra difficulty.

Jonathan Horton/USA: Spend as much time swinging pommel horse as you do playing video games. OK, maybe not that much, but after an unbelievable turnaround from 2009 to 2010, you're one routine away from a shinier all-around medal (although a world bronze is not too shabby).

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Nikolai Kuksenkov/UKR: Train harder, complain less. If you think you should have beaten Jonathan Horton at the 2010 worlds, then prove it the next time you face him. It's not as if Horton had the home advantage in Rotterdam.

Octavian Bellu/ROU: Find a new strategy for your team on uneven bars, and practice it all day, every day, until you get some results. If the Russians can teach all their gymnasts a Maloney with a half turn, so can you.

Danell Leyva, Yin Alvarez/USA: Keep doing what you're doing. I'll take a coach who hugs over one that scolds any day. Yin, I realize people think your sideline contortions are a distraction, but they are unique and entertaining. And anything that enlivens the crowd at a men's gymnastics meet is a good thing.

Paul Hamm/USA: Health. And maybe forgo that stutz to one rail on parallel bars for this comeback.

Now, who did I miss?