

Written by Dwight Normile

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"What has always made modern gymnastics unique is its emphasis on artistic acrobatics, where, in the words of the FIG Code of Points, Difficulty ... was never to be escalated at the expense of mastery. This sentiment expresses the heart and the art of gymnastics — that no matter what we do, we should always do it with the ultimate form, grace and aesthetic control at our command. Today, this isn't the case. ...Apparently, it has been decided that if someone performs a movement of higher difficulty, ugly form is fine."

### Stretching OUT

IG Editor  
Dwight Normile



The above may sound current, but it actually is an excerpt from a "Guest Opinion" in the January 1980 IG. The article, titled "Before It's Too Late," by Dan Millman, surprised me when I came across it recently, as it expresses much the same viewpoint we've been preaching in IG for years.

So the problem of difficulty drowning artistry is not new at all. It's just become more accepted.

Artistry is indeed a nebulous term. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what creates it in a gymnastics routine, but you certainly know when it's absent. And it's missing most of the time now. The soulful performances of true mastery have been replaced, at times, by efforts of sheer survival.

Case in point: Huang Xu's parallel bars routine from the 2007 World Championship apparatus finals (you can view it on YouTube). Armed — or rather, armbanded — with 7.1 of difficulty, he would have won the gold had he not taken an intermediate swing after his opening sequence. Huang was on his upper arms nine different times in the routine. He slammed onto his arms — on purpose — after six flight elements: five double backs and a front-1 1/4. Each was followed by a front uprise, swing handstand. That's six front uprise, swing handstands in one routine. How can the rules allow for that? Huang did about 25 skills, two of which were connected aesthetically. The rest looked more like a repetitive training drill: get to a handstand, throw a double...

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