

29 Olympic Qualification Competitions, but the Rules Were Approved Again.

By Hardy Fink, October 20, 2024

It took 29 international competitions (*2WChamps, 12Wcups, 15CUchamps*) to identify the qualified Olympians. In what universe is this reasonable? For many decades it was done in one, two or three competitions. How can this 29-competition insanity have been endorsed again for the coming cycle? In the past three years I have analyzed and alerted all federations and FIG authorities about the flawed and unjust World Championship & Olympic Qualification System. The FIG Council, and various committees and commissions should wish to serve the membership responsibly. They had three years to adjust something. Instead, each year, they apparently deemed it good and voted for it – imposed it - again. It is demonstrably not good. It is appalling. It is unfair. It is unjust. It does not serve any federation. It is especially damaging for federations from the huge non-European Continental Unions.

Let me summarize: *(For deeper analysis, please review or request my previous three letters.)*

- The cancellation of the mid-cycle open team World Championship saves exactly one competition day in four years. This cancellation of the one open team WC per cycle, and the one day saved, damages most of the gymnastics world financially, developmentally and aspirationally. It is not unreasonable to expect one open team World Championship every four years.
- Qualification through Continental Unions (15 competitions) to attend World Championships has enormous financial costs and imposes intense travel related and additional major competition stressors on gymnasts. Among much else, it ignores the well-being of gymnasts. It is most significantly costly and stressful for the NFs from the geographically enormous non-European continents, who must then still pay to attend the World Championships
- The Continental quotas are massively wrong and unfair and unjust. They were based, without warning, on 2018 results. They are now permanent (!); and they unashamedly benefit Europe. They do not reflect the reality of today's gymnastics world. *(Europe: 54% of team quotas; but only 30% of member NFs; and a very low % of world medals: 2022 33% of medals; 2023 21% of medals; 2024 26% of medals.)*
- The World Cup part of Olympic qualification (12 competitions) is a complete sham. It rarely selects the best specialists, it is ignored by top teams, it is too expensive for non-Europeans, and it is beset with problems. Nearly anyone who attends only one World Cup can qualify as a specialist even with zero ranking points and nearly all rank near the bottom at World Championships.
- For the post-Olympic World Championships, the 3-per country; 2-per apparatus participation criteria are philosophically and logically indefensible for what is supposed to be a specialist and all-around World Championship. Dozens of potential medalists will be forced to stay at home. How can the Technical Committees have allowed this to happen? Why is something being “tried” that is known in advance to be so glaringly illogical?

It is time for the NFs to hold those authorities accountable that refuse to consider the financial and developmental health and aspirations of the member nations. It is necessary to ask each

candidate what they will do and, if they will fight, to make regulations fair and just for the whole world and not just Europe.

These regulations that were endorsed again by the Council in May continue to exclude and financially punish most NFs. This is the first administration to somehow think that the way to improve gymnastics is to have less of it, to reduce access, to increase costs for all NFs, to in effect exclude new NFs, to ignore sport-justice and equal conditions for all.

Predictable consequences were initially, in 2019, not fully considered. But now, even after thorough evaluations and in full knowledge of the terrible consequences of this unfair system, it has been endorsed again. The authorities must be able to justify what they have decided, and the federations must hold them accountable, because it is the federations and gymnasts that suffer the consequences.

These regulations could still be modified at the 2025 Council Meeting. Otherwise, there can be no change until the 2029-2032 cycle because Olympic Qualification will have begun early in 2026. It cannot be acceptable that such a flawed system is perpetuated indefinitely. *(I did not analyze the regulations for TRA and RG - this is for someone else to do - but I know them to be similar.)*

In my opinion, the easiest and most palatable solution is to return to the system in place from 2005 to 2021. The current "system" is so flawed as to be unsustainable. It must be trashed. If federations agree, then they must actively fight for a more reasonable future in the competition system and much else.

Respectfully, *"always, and in all ways, in the interests of gymnastics world-wide,"*

Hardy Fink