A Balance of Power:

Women’s Artistic Gymnastics During the Cold War and Its Aftermath

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The University of Western Australia

School of Humanities, History

2017
Abstract

Women’s Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) entered Olympic competition in 1952, when the first appearance of the USSR started forty years of ascendancy. By 2000, emphasis on spectacle and risk had replaced its balletic origins. This research traces such development of WAG during the Cold War and its aftermath, through exploration of the differing responses to Soviet domination in the United States, Australia and the international gymnastics federation (FIG). It pursues this through semi-structured oral histories, print media sources and – uniquely among studies of gymnastics – the archives of the FIG and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In doing so this thesis has two aims: first, to make sense of WAG’s development with consideration of international sporting governance, and second, to position it within wider understandings of the Cold War.

In this thesis I argue that the context of the Cold War was crucial to the development of WAG, both internationally and domestically within the USA as well as Australia. Cold War rivalry heightened the importance placed on Olympic competition as one of the foremost demonstrations of soft power and national ascendancy. The Cold War not only motivated the pursuit of international success on the Olympic stage, it resulted in female gymnasts being used in political endeavours. It influenced the rhetoric surrounding women’s sport, where women’s gymnastics was in the vanguard. It affected the governance of international sport and judging of gymnastics. Moreover it flavoured the Olympic landscape of the time, lying beneath issues such as amateurism and the slowly professionalizing nature of the Games.

However, the Cold War was not the only influence on WAG’s development. These issues were negotiated by the international non-government organizations controlling international sport, which endeavoured (with varying success) to remain aloof from politics. Within the FIG, there was debate over the feminine vision for WAG, which differed from the acrobatic practices of the gymnasts. Within the IOC, there was concern over the size of the Olympic programme, of which gymnastics was considered to occupy more space than it deserved. The FIG was thus caught between its two main stakeholders, and the debates waged within the sport reflect this duality.

In WAG lies a microcosm of socio-cultural issues that have been mediated by its participants, spectators and governors. This research is significant because WAG illustrates the on-going dialogue between sport and society. It thus contributes to the growing body of work on sport during the Cold War, which until now has largely excluded gymnastics. Furthermore, it also marks one of the few attempts to study the history of WAG as a competitive sport.
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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Mark Edele and Tony Barker. It is only with their unfailing support and encouragement that I have been able to come this far. Tony in particular has devoted much of his time and interest to this work. Their gentle criticisms have taught me much about research and writing, without compromising my motivation. In fact, with them I was always inspired to continue pursuing my research. I could not have asked anything more from these two scholars.

Thanks also to the wider discipline group of History at the University of Western Australia, which has been an excellent environment to undertake this work. I give my sincerest gratitude also to the history department at the University of Otago – I am certain that without this solid foundation I would never have been able to come this far.

I have been the beneficiary of several scholarships from the University of Western Australia, without which this work would have been impossible. The Graduate Research School enabled me to undertake the first research trip for this project, and funds from the Broeze Award enabled a second trip to collect oral histories. The Postgraduate Student’s Association topped up this award, so to them I also extend my thanks.

I owe a great debt to the team at the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, and their award of a PhD grant to complete this research. In an old villa atop the lake, these are more than the most beautiful archives in the world, they are a haven for the sport historian, and the friendliness of the staff there enhances the experience. Thanks to Nuria Puig, for arranging my visit, and to the staff for their unfailing positivity and helpfulness, particularly Stephanie Moreno and the entire archivist team. Thanks also to the staff at the Reid Library at the University of Western Australia, who have been extremely patient with the infinite influx of books I have requested from around the world.

Beyond the archives, I extend my thanks to staff at the FIG, Nicolas Buompane, and particularly Philippe Silacci. These men took an interest in this work, provided a list of names and contact details for oral histories, and organized a media pass to conduct interviews at the 2014 world championships in China. Thanks also to all those who were willing to engage in interviews with me, particularly Hardy Fink, who was always willing to answer my questions later in the research.

The small group of international scholars researching WAG have also made me feel
welcome in academia, and their interest in this work encouraged me to keep going. To Natalie Barker-Ruchti, Astrid Schubing and Myrian Nunomura: thank you for taking me on and trusting me as part of your team. Here, I would like to extend a special thanks to Roslyn Kerr, who had a great role in facilitating this network, and who has been a kind of unofficial mentor for me throughout my PhD. I am humbled you took an interest in me.

My thanks also to the other scholars I have met at various conferences, who have also been a fantastic source of insight, debate, advice, and empathy. You are too numerous to name, although I would like to mention the team in sports sciences at the University of Lausanne, who adopted me into their academic world, particularly Gregory Quin.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their unwavering support, belief in me, and patience. Janet Klee, your encouragement has been crucial. Neil Cervin, all those times you answered my questions with thirty minute lectures, thank you for beginning my interest in history. Greta Cervin, thank you for being a reminder of normal life throughout all of this. And finally, my thanks to Christopher Heydon who helped conceive this project and has been my biggest supporter along the way.
Statement of Candidate Contribution

The examination of the thesis is an examination of the work of the student. The work must have been substantially conducted by the student during enrolment in the degree. Where the thesis includes work to which others have contributed, the thesis must include a statement that makes the student’s contribution clear to the examiners. This may be in the form of a description of the precise contribution of the student to the work presented for examination and/or a statement of the percentage of the work that was done by the student. In addition, in the case of co-authored publications included in the thesis, each author must give their signed permission for the work to be included.

Chapters three and four have been published as two separate articles, both of which were sole-authored by the candidate, Georgia Cervin. The details are as follow:


Extracts from chapters six and seven have been used to contribute to a co-authored article with Roslyn Kerr of Lincoln University, New Zealand, with each author contributing 50 per cent. For this article, most of the data and writing on WAG in Australia comes from this thesis, along with the explanation on the use of archival sources. Kerr was responsible for the New Zealand data, organization of the article and its invitation to the special issue. The citation for this article is as follows:


Signature of Student, Georgia Cervin: ____________________________

Signature of Co-Author, Roslyn Kerr: ____________________________

Signature of Co-Ordinating Supervisor, Mark Edele: ____________________________
Statement of Ethics Approval

Approval to conduct this research was provided by the University of Western Australia, under number – RA/4/1/6313, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person who participated in this research project, or agreed to participate, was informed that they could raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person who was not satisfied with the response of researcher was informed that they could raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project. The contact details of the UWA human research ethics unit were provided to them.
## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAU</td>
<td>Amateur Athletics Union [of the United States of America]</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAGU</td>
<td>Australian Amateur Gymnastics Union (later AGF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGF</td>
<td>Australian Gymnastics Federation (earlier AAGU)</td>
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<td>AOF</td>
<td>Australian Olympic Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOC</td>
<td>British Olympic Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Executive Committee [of the FIG]</td>
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<td>FIG</td>
<td>Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique</td>
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<tr>
<td>IF</td>
<td>International Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non Government Organization</td>
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<td>IOC</td>
<td>International Olympic Committee</td>
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<td>MAG</td>
<td>Men’s Artistic Gymnastics</td>
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<td>MTC</td>
<td>Men’s Technical Committee [of the FIG]</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC</td>
<td>National Olympic Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAG</td>
<td>United States of America Gymnastics (earlier USGF)</td>
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<td>USGF</td>
<td>United States Gymnastics Federation (later USAG)</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<tr>
<td>USOC</td>
<td>United States Olympic Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAG</td>
<td>Women’s Artistic Gymnastics</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>Women’s Technical Committee [of the FIG]</td>
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Introduction

This thesis examines Women’s Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) during the Cold War, the geopolitical conflict that defined East-West relations throughout much of the twentieth century. Since its Olympic debut in 1952, the sport has evolved phenomenally in ways very different from most others. Where improved times and distances are the more common markers of change, WAG has been transformed from its original balletic fluidity into a dynamic and acrobatic event. Driving the changes was WAG’s most successful nation, the Soviet Union. In the broader Cold War confrontation, Soviet domination of WAG was a powerful demonstration of the value of ‘soft power’, one that did not go unchallenged in the West.¹ With a major emphasis on the US and Australia, this thesis seeks to explain the transformation of WAG and, in turn, position it within broader issues concerning sport during the Cold War. In asking why and how WAG developed between 1952 and 2000 the thesis focuses especially on the responses of Australia and the USA to Soviet success and how changes and their inherent conflicts and controversies were mediated by the governing bodies, the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). I argue that the history of WAG is one of a balance of power: between national interests in asserting sporting supremacy, between the IOC and FIG, and within the FIG itself.

Although gymnastics has been an Olympic sport since the birth of the modern Games in 1896, women’s gymnastics did not appear on the roster until 1928. Largely based on the European teachings of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Pehr Henrik Ling and the traditions of Turnverein and Sokol, the men’s version had grown

especially out of military training. The women’s version borrowed the men’s apparatus, but suitably modified in a way that enhanced femininity by offering a socially acceptable sporting activity for women. Indeed, my archival research revealed that the FIG initially also attempted to assume control of a wide range of women’s physical activities, including track and field events. Women’s gymnastics appeared again at the 1936 and 1948 Games, but it remained a team only competition, contested through an inconsistent mélange of events. It was not until the 1952 Olympic Games, co-incidentally the first involving the Soviet Union, that women’s gymnastics became Women’s Artistic Gymnastics, a standardized sport consisting of individual, apparatus, and team contests always in the same four events: vault, uneven bars, balance beam, and floor. Yet six years after WAG’s debut, both the men’s and women’s disciplines remained peripheral sports in the West: 'To most Americans,' declared Life magazine, ‘gymnastics is an athletic ritual pursued by crackpots, muscle-bound culturists, and misguided persons named Ivan.'

Its marginalization in Western sporting cultures left the Eastern bloc free to dominate the sport. Indeed, the absence of strong Western competitors allowed the Soviet Union to earn nearly every gold medal in WAG’s Olympic history: no small


feat, with six events to contest, and eighteen medals to be won at each Games. In the context of the Cold War and the sporting rivalry it created, the abundance of Olympic medals to be won from gymnastics was of immense value to the communist state, which held a firm monopoly on them throughout its political domination of Eastern Europe. Over the fifty years and ten times in which the Soviet Union competed in WAG at the Olympic Games it won a staggering 92 medals. The paragon of its domination was a 100 per cent gold medal rate in the prestigious team competition.

If the “Cold War” can be understood not merely as a military conflict deferred, held in reserve, but also as the continuous pursuit of victory by other means,’ then sport, including WAG, certainly was potentially a contested space: a high profile propaganda opportunity to demonstrate one’s superiority. While the Soviet Union's remarkable domination of WAG initially provoked little enthusiasm for emulation in countries like the USA and Australia, eventually US President John F. Kennedy used an article in *Sports Illustrated* to identify improvements in American physical education and sport as vital Cold War weapons.

We face in the Soviet Union a powerful and implacable adversary determined to show the world that only the Communist system possesses the vigour and determination necessary to satisfy awakening aspirations for progress and the elimination of poverty and want. To meet the challenge of this enemy will

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6 144 medals were available over this period, with each Olympics holding the possibility of winning: one medal available in the team competition, three medals in the All-Around competition, three medals in each of the four apparatus until 1972 and from 1976 onwards, two medals in each of the four apparatus. This gave the Soviet Union a success rate of 64 per cent. 'Official Olympic Games Results,' International Olympic Committee, http://www.olympic.org/olympic-results.

The President and all departments of government must make it clearly understood that the promotion of sports participation and physical fitness is a basic and continuing policy of the United States.  

Although Kennedy was announcing an American challenge to Soviet sporting power, he was not, in that article, addressing the socio-cultural barriers in sport that disadvantaged Western nations nor foreseeing the actions that would change them over the next fifty years. One major barrier, amateurism, affected all sports by preventing the best athletes from being paid, or precluding talented individuals from participation due to their need to earn an income. While that issue affected all sports, gymnastics also suffered from being a minor one in the West, and WAG from being a women’s sport. In fact, Western discourse soon accused the Eastern bloc of strategically targeting such sports in international competitions due to the lack of competition from the West. A *Life* magazine headline left its readers in no doubt: 'How the Soviet Union Won All Those Points: Domination of ‘Minor’ Sports Puts Soviets Far Ahead of U.S.' Such rhetoric involved a two-part attack on Soviet Olympic success. It was targeting easily won medals in sports in which most other countries did not compete, and relying on women athletes also underrepresented in the West to do so.

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While the Soviet Union may have had a well-devised medal winning strategy, supported by serious investment into developing athletes, it took some time before the success of Soviet women athletes forced Americans to see that the lack of female representation on their own team undermined their Olympic effort. Similar reflection also prompted the realization that in order to keep up with the Soviet Olympic effort, the US and Australia would have to expand their investment in sports they had heretofore considered marginal. While Soviet traditions of physical culture combined with communist notions of gender roles to support their female gymnasts, it was only in the later part of the Cold War that it was acknowledged that Western interpretations of amateur sport and of women’s roles had undermined efforts to counter Soviet domination with a competitive female programme.

Aims

The Eastern bloc domination of WAG, coupled with the politicized interpretation of sporting success, leads to the central question of this research: how and why did WAG develop the way it did? Coinciding with the period from 1952 to 2000, this question is framed in the context of the Cold War and its aftermath. In particular, this thesis seeks to understand the responses of Western nations, the USA and Australia, to Eastern bloc domination of WAG. It asks what the role of the Cold War and its inherent patriotic rivalry was, as well as the effect of the different, evolving sports

systems of the latter twentieth century. At the same time, the overall question of how WAG was approached and experienced across different cultures must of course take account of wider contexts than simply national and cultural differences.

Gymnastics operated within the Olympic family and, as one of its flagship sports, was not immune to the mandates of the IOC.12 This organization and gymnastics’ governing body, the FIG, acted as international non-government organizations (INGOs).13 In doing so they were not only the directors of the sport, but facilitators of international cooperation and mediators of sports diplomacy. My research aims to shed light on their role both within WAG and in wider international sporting relations.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that WAG's evolution involved social, cultural, and political values changing in the twentieth century only partly because of the Cold War. While Soviet authoritarianism eventually yielded to glasnost and perestroika, the West was both booming economically and reassessing such fundamental issues as the class divisions embedded in amateurism and the gender discrimination implicit in the rhetoric surrounding women’s sport.

Sport History

This thesis is located firmly within the field of sport history. Sport has not always been given adequate attention as a lens to viewing wider political, economic, or class

12 Gymnastics is a currently a top tier sport, sharing this title with swimming and athletics, and in the Olympic files as early as the 1950s the IOC was reassuring the FIG that it considered gymnastics a base sport, central to the Games. Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD3- Correspondence 1950-1955: D-RM02-GYMNA/003. (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
issues in the past, and has often been trivialized by its status as a leisure activity outside of academic enquiry.\textsuperscript{14} However, early works by J. A. Mangan, James Riordan and Allen Guttmann, among others, established the social significance of sport, demonstrating its role in class divisions, social cohesion and policy, and mirroring wider social phenomena.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, sport has provided historians with new understandings of issues such as race\textsuperscript{16} and gender. However, as Stephen Pope and John Nauright asserted, ‘all scholarly attempts to capture the “totality” of a given field of academic study are invariably partial and incomplete’.\textsuperscript{17} With this in mind, I outline here some of the key issues and trends in the broader fields with which this work engages. The most important texts will be given greater attention within the chapters to which they are most relevant.

First is a point of contention that frequently surfaces in the theoretical work in sport history: that the work is not analytical enough, instead relying on narrative.\textsuperscript{18}


In a discipline populated by ‘fans with typewriters’ \(^{19}\) and interdisciplinary researchers, this is somewhat unsurprising. \(^{20}\) In his Master’s thesis Rob Hess observed this trend: ‘What little sport history there was had originally derived from Departments of Physical Education and not from Departments of History, and therefore the focus had tended to be on sport \textit{per se} rather than on viewing it as a vital part of society’s past.’ \(^{21}\) Pope and Nauright contrast such texts with the work of professionally trained historians, who ‘attempt to contextualise sport within broader historical currents’. \(^{22}\) A fundamental lesson emerging from the debates about sport history is that it should look not only within the sport, but also at its relationship with a broader context. The ‘smirks and repressed laughs from so-called “mainstream” historians’ that sport history suffered prior to the 1970s may be understandable. \(^{23}\) But equally, as Hess also observed, introspective, blow by blow accounts of sport were necessary steps before its wider historical significance could be determined. This thesis faces this problem to an extent: without a strong body of work already existing on WAG, it is necessary to delve into the minutiae of the sport before attempting to place it within broader contexts.

A second key issue in sport history has been growing interest in transnationalism exemplified in Matthew Taylor’s suggestion that its practitioners

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\(^{19}\) Pope and Nauright, 'Introduction,' 5.

\(^{20}\) That is not to say interdisciplinary researchers are unwelcome but rather, those who take an interest in the sporting past do not necessarily take an interest in the method of history as a rigorous academic pursuit.


\(^{22}\) Pope and Nauright, 'Introduction,' 9.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
examine ‘processes and actors that move across territorial boundaries of diverse nation-states.’ He sees these flows and movements as themselves ‘constructive of change, as causally significant, and thus as producing history’. Shohei Sato provided an important example of such an approach in seeing judo as a result of the convergence of several different cultures all making a mark on the sport, an idea that runs parallel to this research.

Taylor also stressed the importance of transnational relationships led by International [sports] Federations (IFs), and other organizations that throughout the twentieth century standardized and codified their sports. Scholars such as Heather Dichter have advocated conceptualizing such groups as INGOs, and historians like Paul Darby have shown how such organizations as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA] played an important role in international relations, expanding the World Cup by appealing to newly decolonized states seeking to establish themselves within the international community.

While the evolving historiographical trends establish the FIG, the IOC, and their relationships as crucial to analysis of both WAG itself and its political significance, one of the most obvious examples of the relationship between sport and politics lies in the history of the Cold War.

27 Dichter, 'Diplomatic and International History.'
The relationship between the Cold War and international sport was succinctly captured by Robert Edelman:

In this new era, Communism and capitalism were still to compete with each other, but that competition was now to take on peaceful as well as more dangerous forms. The Olympic Games, with their historically militaristic overtones and controlled opportunities for state nationalism, soon became one element of that competition, and the quadrennial event was transformed into a surrogate for the Cold War. In the light of these developments, the [Soviet Communist] Party sought to portray subsequent Soviet dominance of the Olympics as proof of the superiority of Communist methods, not only in sports, but in all areas of human endeavor. For many years these efforts would appear to be successful.29

Works on sport during the Cold War owe much to cultural history, which has seen sport interpreted as a form of culture. Seminal to this trend was David Caute’s *The Dancer Defects*, which set the precedent for understanding the Cold War as ‘simultaneously a traditional political-military confrontation between empires… and at the same time, an ideological and cultural contest on a global scale without historical precedent’.30 Pointing to the role of cultural activities in the Cold War, he argued: ‘Never before had empires felt so compelling a need to prove their virtue, to demonstrate their spiritual superiority, to claim the high ground of ‘progress’, to win public support and admiration by gaining ascendancy in each and every event of what might be styled the Cultural Olympics.’31 In this vein, Caute explored the deliberate use of ballet, art, opera, literature, and cinema to create and control

31 Ibid., 3.
perceptions of ideological supremacy.

In an appraisal of the politics of Cold War culture, Tony Shaw asserted that:

Virtually everything, from sport to ballet to comic books and space travel, assumed political significance and hence potentially could be deployed as a weapon both to shape opinion at home and to subvert societies abroad.\textsuperscript{32}

In reviewing several books that marry culture and politics, he revealed it was not only the Soviet Union that sponsored cultural activities for propaganda purposes. Indeed, Toby Charles Rider extended notions of state-sponsored culture to demonstrate how the US State Department invested in covert and psychological warfare through sport.\textsuperscript{33} With the government cooperating with private companies, pro-American and anti-communist propaganda was distributed amongst athletes by the State Department and CIA, with the assistance of organizations such as the National Committee for a Free Europe, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), the Amateur Athletics Union (AAU), and media outlets like Radio Free Europe and \textit{Sports Illustrated}.

Another important volume is David Andrews’ and Stephen Wagg’s \textit{East Plays West} – a concerted approach to understanding Olympic sport in the Cold War. From issues such as amateurism and doping to gender and race, these essays explore a variety of sporting problems and events in light of the Cold War. Contributors’ conclusions are drawn upon throughout this thesis. In particular, Wagg’s work on


media portrayals of female athletes is an important starting point for chapter two, which tackles the same question of media portrayals of women, albeit from a different geographic perspective. Meanwhile, Mary McDonald's and Evelyn Mertin’s essays inform chapter five of this work, concerning the Olympic boycotts. In sum, the volume demonstrates how issues in sport were negotiated and consumed at this time, the Cold War looming large to create binary narratives of good and evil, masculine and feminine; superior and inferior.

Many issues in sport in the Cold War mirrored broader social and political upheavals. Most famously, the ‘Blood in the Water’ water polo match between the Soviet Union and Hungary at the 1956 Olympics reflected conflict within the Eastern bloc, following the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary. More broadly, historians have found that amateurism – one of the original defining features of Olympic sport still proclaimed for much of the period of the Cold War – had reflected class conflict by excluding proletariats from sport. Rising to prominence

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37 Mike Huggins, The Victorians and Sport, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52.
as an Olympic issue when the Soviet Union entered the Games, it reflected broader understandings of the Cold War as an ‘expression of that social conflict waged globally between different social forms that ultimately sought to represent different classes’. \(^{38}\) Examination of primary sources in chapter one deals with this issue in greater detail, demonstrating how the amateur question and later professionalization impacted the sport.

While John Gleaves identified continuing class conflict in the emergence of anti-doping rhetoric, \(^{39}\) Paul Dimeo argued that the discourse around doping had developed into crude international stereotypes: the Eastern bloc are all drug cheats, but Western dopers are individual black sheep. \(^{40}\) Doping, however, has rarely been a problem in gymnastics, as William Sands has explained. \(^{41}\) As an aesthetic sport, not judged to the end that something is done, but rather on the skill of how well it is done, most drugs would be unlikely to enhance performance. Searches of the FIG Bulletins for this thesis have revealed that the Medical Commission announced fewer than five cases of positive doping tests for this entire period.

Although my research did not extend into government records, I acknowledge that others have made convincing claims for the relevance of sport to


international diplomacy. Andrew Johns observed: ‘As a result of its ability to cross political, cultural, social, gender, religious, and economic boundaries and provide a common foundation, sport is especially suitable as a vehicle to build bridges between governments and peoples.’

More directly relevant to my approach is Stuart Murray's reference to the ‘diplomacy that is encapsulated in the multifaceted contacts between a diverse cast of actors that make international sport possible’.

Undoubtedly among those actors are non-state ones like the IOC and International Federations (IFs). Indeed, Postlewaite and Grix assert that such organizations have become crucial to understanding foreign relations, a phenomenon that Heather Dichter has argued needs greater emphasis:

> Broader understandings of diplomatic and international history have opened new connections between these approaches and sport history, particularly as international sport organizations are some of the most well-known international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).

It is such organizations that are central to my research: the IOC and FIG. Although the leaders of the IOC were genuinely committed to separate spheres for sport and politics, I show in chapter five that the organization nevertheless had moments of active political investment.


45 Dichter, 'Diplomatic and International History,' 1741.
One of the most explicit uses of athletes in diplomacy was in the boycotts of the 1980 and 1984 Games. Both of these incidents exemplify how sport was a political tool, with directives coming from the government level.\textsuperscript{46} Although several texts were published shortly after the 1980 boycott,\textsuperscript{47} there has been little historical analysis or revision of the boycotts together, other than a handful of works, which have tended to focus more on the 1980 incident than the 1984 Games.\textsuperscript{48} In one of the most comprehensive works, Nicholas Sarantakes argues that the 1980 boycott was President Jimmy Carter’s answer to leadership threats, ineffective foreign policy and the search for an effective non-military protest against the Soviet offensive in Afghanistan\textsuperscript{49} – conclusions that the primary sources used in this thesis also support. While Guttmann saw the absence of the Soviet Union four years later as a tit-for-tat policy,\textsuperscript{50} Edelman’s later revision points to genuine safety concerns as a major factor in the Soviets’ absence,\textsuperscript{51} as the Soviets claimed and as IOC sources unearthed for this research confirm in chapter five. Beyond the debates regarding the motivations

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{49} Nicolas Evan Sarantakes, \textit{Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Allen Guttmann, 'The Cold War and the Olympics,' \textit{International Journal}, 43, no. 4 (1988).
\end{itemize}
behind the boycotts, Harold Wilson’s work also engages with their meaning: he argued that Romania’s failure to join the Los Angeles Boycott pointed to tensions within the Eastern bloc.\(^{52}\) Although this thesis cannot draw on the sources needed to make such claims, it too attempts to survey the boycotts’ implications both within WAG and the wider Olympic movement.

**Sports Systems**

Despite that reinterpretation, sport was emphatically part of the Soviet Cold War programme, accounting, argued Shaw, ‘for one third of all Soviet cultural contacts with other countries’.\(^ {53}\) Indeed, as Thierry Terret noted, the availability of former Soviet sources has vastly improved historians’ understandings of the Cold War, and sport has been a fruitful area for analysis.\(^ {54}\) Scholars of Soviet sporting history have also contributed enormously to understanding the East-West conflict’s relationship with sport, particularly Soviet investment in it as a means of producing Cold War victory. Research by James Riordan, Robert Edelman, and Sylvain Dufraisse has gone behind the Iron Curtain to examine the role of sport in Soviet society. In seeing it as a means of mobilizing the nation, examining its varying domestic and international implications, and assessing the State’s use of sporting heroes, these scholars have provided a wealth of knowledge on the ‘Soviet sports machine’.\(^ {55}\) The


\(^{53}\) Shaw, 'The Politics of Cold War Culture,' 60.

\(^{54}\) Thierry Terret, 'Sport in Eastern Europe During the Cold War,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26, no. 4 (2009).

sports system creating and supporting elite gymnasts was an important factor in their success and would later be replicated in other parts of the world, as I demonstrate in chapters six and seven.

Meanwhile Elizabeth Woods, viewing gender as an organizational principle, asserted that women were mobilized in revolutionary Russia as a way of bringing them into the public sphere in order to expand the appeal of the Communist Party and assist in solidifying its authority.\(^{56}\) Drawing on Friedrich Engels, Riordan explained that ‘under socialism, as the means of production passed into common ownership, women would gain equal access to economic, social and political activities.’\(^{57}\) Providing the link to sport, Riordan quoted Lenin: ‘It is our urgent task to draw women into sport.’\(^{58}\) Thus the basis for women’s inclusion in sport as a cornerstone of Soviet ideology was formed early on, and continued to underpin its stance on women’s sport internationally, as I discuss in chapter two.

A 1987 Soviet publication asserted that their gymnasts’ success was due to the immense popularity the sport enjoyed in that nation. ‘All in all about a million people from all age brackets go for it. Such popularity is what breeds the mastery the

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\(^{56}\) Elizabeth Woods, The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

\(^{57}\) Riordan, 'The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia and the U.S.S.R.,' 184.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 190.
Soviet gymnasts display internationally. 59 While such a wide demographic base to draw from certainly helped gymnastics in the Soviet Union, so did the system supporting it.

According to Riordan, both Soviet rhetoric and Western perception held that ‘Soviet athletes are successful not because they constitute a privileged elite, but because the society they live in makes the widest possible provision for all to take part in sport.’ 60 But Edelman demonstrated this was myth: ‘We now know that the Soviets excelled at these sports precisely because the government pursued a conscious policy of supporting them.’ 61 Only by concentrating on sports not popular in the West were the Soviets able to appear as dominant. 62

As many other countries were still reluctant to allow women to engage in sport, attainment of women’s medals would be relatively easier than men’s, and WAG was seen as particularly appropriate for women. 63 The pattern of domination already beginning to form in the 1950s only served to encourage the continued investment in gymnastics. 64 For instance, Mary O’Brien showed that the Russian Gymnastics Federations’ rules were set at a more difficult level than those required by the FIG, to ensure their gymnasts were performing at a level above the rest of the

60 Riordan, 'The U.S.S.R.,' 15.
61 Edelman, Serious Fun, viii.
62 Riordan, Sport in Soviet Society, 126.
63 Ibid., 322.
64 Ibid., 31.
world.\textsuperscript{65} However, as I demonstrate in chapter three, the Soviet Union also pursued other means of ensuring its gymnasts scored the highest.

Supporting these efforts was a systematic programme devised to achieve sports targets (world championship and Olympic medals), with athletes and their coaches being awarded bonuses for success. Although such practices would invite criticism from the West, many Western nations eventually adopted their own sports systems based on this model.

Green and Houlihan noted: ‘an athlete must now train full time … supported by a retinue of coaches, trainers, logistical staff, and others…’\textsuperscript{66} In this way, understanding of the Soviet sports system is important, as it facilitated the improvement of international sporting achievements and led other nations to attempt to keep pace with similar investment. In Australia, recognition of new sporting imperatives continued throughout the 1970s, culminating in the emergence of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1980, as I discuss in chapter six. Despite rhetoric suggesting that athletic success inspired healthier lifestyles, the establishment of the AIS emphasised elite sport over mass participation in an era of growing professionalization.\textsuperscript{67} Tara Magdalinski acknowledged its aims and inspiration:

The growing financial backing of elite sport, the foundation of the AIS and the increasingly centralized organization of sport throughout the 1980s were tied to the recognition that Australian sport could not match the successes of communist nations without adopting the organization strategies and the more

\textsuperscript{65} O’Brien, ‘An Investigation of the Processes Which Produce Elite Women Gymnasts in the U.S.S.R.’


\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 31.
professional and scientific approach to ‘producing’ athletes that had underscored the success of Eastern bloc athletes.\textsuperscript{68}

Green and Oakley found that Eastern bloc success prompted both active responses (the adoption of policy) and passive responses (opinions requiring or resulting in no action) in Western nations.\textsuperscript{69} Chapters six to eight discuss how active responses became particularly important to WAG with the transfer of knowledge from East to West.

Little has been written specifically about Australian gymnastics, except Kolt’s and Kirkby’s short history. Although they use only five sources, their work reveals that the sport was largely club-based until 1980 and WAG was of secondary status: women were first invited to the national championships only in 1959, their first team participation in the World Championships came in 1970. However, the two authors do suggest that remarkable gains of the 1980s and 1990s were due in large part to the work of the AIS,\textsuperscript{70} as I explore in detail in chapter six.

Meanwhile, the US response was equally targeted although more reflective of American liberalism. While the government did make a concerted effort to improve


\textsuperscript{69} Mike Green and Ben Oakley, 'Elite Sport Development Systems and Playing to Win: Uniformity and Diversity in International Approaches,' \textit{Leisure Studies}, 20, no. 4 (2001).

\textsuperscript{70} Gregory Kolt and Robert Kirkby, 'A Brief History of Gymnastics in Australia,' \textit{Australian Society for Sports History}, 26, (1997).
the physical activity of its citizens, it relied on discrete organizations and clubs to meet the Soviet challenge in sport. However, as Jeffrey Montez de Oca showed, this in itself was a direct response to the Soviet offensive, contrasting American liberalism with the Soviet Union’s ‘totalitarian’ approach. Moreover, as Marten van Bottenburg demonstrated, sports providers in the USA were primarily educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities), not-for-profit organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association, and ‘club like businesses such as fitness and health centres’. With a relatively small following, gymnastics belonged in the latter category, and although WAG would become a National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) sport, it did not draw elite gymnasts from the college system, instead supplying former elite gymnasts to it. Pointing to changes that would benefit American gymnastics in the 1980s and 1990s, Bottenburg explains that in an aim to raise standards, colleges modelled their programmes along the lines of professional sports. As I explore in chapter six, increasing professional opportunities for gymnasts in the USA would coincide with their acceleration up the ranks.

Meanwhile, Laptad’s contemporary work on the organization of the United States Gymnastics Federation (USGF) illuminates more specifically the state of

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72 Ibid., 123.


74 Ibid., 216.
American gymnastics until 1970. Quarrelling between the AAU, the NCAA and a group of coaches divided authority over American gymnastics. In doing so, it had prevented any real progress in planning a response to the Soviet challenge. Although his work implies that men’s gymnastics was the priority for these groups, it also demonstrates how the Soviet success in ‘minor sports’ prompted greater investment in WAG after the foundation of the USGF and its recognition by the FIG.

**Women’s Sport**

All of the factors discussed above must be contextualized in the framework of women’s sport, within which WAG was created. For instance, in his brief explanation of the initial reasons for choosing WAG’s apparatus, Jim Prestidge said the balance beam’s design was to showcase the woman athlete ‘balanced high on her slim pedestal, in all her feminine charm and elegance’. Whether he recognized it or not, such a claim reveals the gendered cultural foundation upon which WAG has been built.

There has been a wealth of historical research on ‘women’s sport,’ from Allen Guttmann’s meticulous works to Jaime Schultz's equally detailed and

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contextually conceived *Qualifying Times*. While a positive step in recognizing that women engaged in more than the simple ‘physical activity’ and ‘light gymnastic exercises’ recommended in the late nineteenth century, the more recent research also highlights a contradiction in sport history: why were these women and their sports not included in all general sport histories?

Most later revisionism has found that the development of women’s sport has been shaped – and therefore been constricted – by the social construction of sport as an inherently masculine domain. In the early twentieth century, socially acceptable exercises and sports were developed for women in order to protect their femininity. ‘In effect,’ observed Susan Cahn, ‘educators created a respectable “feminine” brand of athletics designed to maximize female participation while averting controversy.’ However, she also found that ‘efforts to create a separate, distinct women’s brand of sport effectively defined “feminine” sport as a lesser version of male sport: less competitive, less demanding, and less skilful.’ Indeed these processes can be seen in the origins of WAG. Lois Bryant explained the roots of such constructions: ‘sport is one of the most significant areas for forming and maintaining masculine and


84 Ibid., 5.
feminine identity, and this in turn underpins the reproduction of male dominance. But while sport has long been conceived as a masculine domain, research into other sports, such as football, reveal women’s long-time involvement in spite of gendered connotations.

Mangan’s and Park’s collection explains how physical activity was a form of social and corporeal control or liberation, which influenced women’s participation before the First World War. Similarly, Patricia Vertinsky explored how understandings of women’s roles as wife and mother reinforced beliefs about femininity and submissiveness and tended to encourage abstinence from sport.

Such understandings lingered throughout the century, with Adrienne Blue arguing that women who had borne children excelled because they had removed psychological barriers to success: their femininity could not be questioned.

Blue was building on revision of gendered assumptions surrounding sport that had begun a decade prior in the sciences. For example, in 1979, Jack Wilmore found that, despite substantial differences between the average male and the average female, elite male and female athletes were almost exactly matched physiologically.

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87 Mangan and Park, *From ’Fair Sex’ to Feminism*.
and physically. In tests of ‘the average,’ the almost invariably more sedentary lifestyles of women had contributed to muscle fibres inferior to men’s: the difference was not a biological precondition. In that same year, Ken Dyer also argued that it was indeed social restrictions that had detrimentally affected women’s physical and physiological aptitude for sport. In addition to pushing women towards distinctive lifestyle patterns, there was immense pressure on them to abstain from engaging in sport or displaying any competitive or aggressive tendencies. Years later, Mary Jo Kane would propose a new framework to replace such outmoded assumptions: women and men should not be seen as binary in terms of athletic ability, but as individuals on a sporting spectrum, where some men may perform better than some women, and vice versa.

Before Kane’s call for new understandings of gender and sport, Elizabeth Ferris presented a paper to the International Congress on Women and Sport in Rome in 1980, which remains in the Olympic archives. She concluded:

If a woman in a country where participation in sport is encouraged and rewarded can produce performances of a calibre that surpass the top men in another country, it is not unreasonable to suggest that sociological factors are at work. If the social attitude to women in sport is to demean, discourage and undermine them, it is hardly surprising that the standards of female

This analysis becomes critical to understanding the Soviet Union’s athletic, including gymnastic, success compared to that of American female athletes. The way Soviet women were encouraged to be involved in sport contributed enormously to the Soviet Olympic effort. Similarly, Jennifer Hargreaves found that ‘under communism relatively equal resources were devoted to male and female sports; during the 1970s the Soviet and East German Olympic teams were composed of a higher proportion of female athletes than Western teams, and the women won a higher percentage of medals than the men’. Riordan went so far as to claim that during the USA-USSR dual meets in track and field from 1958 – 1981, ‘if it had not been for the Soviet women competitors, the USSR would have lost the majority of matches’.  

If Wickmore’s, Dyer’s and Ferris’ accusations around social barriers to women’s sport in the West were true, the opposite could be said for Soviet females, according to Riordan:

94 ‘Lenin saw in sport a convenient vehicle for drawing women into public activity.’ Riordan, Sport in Soviet Society, 64.
96 Riordan, 'The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia and the U.S.S.R.,' 194.
Such commitment to international success (the only area—apart from space conquest—in which the USSR has been able to demonstrate superiority over the USA) has had far-reaching implications for sport and gender, with far fewer official prejudices directed against high-level Soviet women’s (Olympic) sport than has generally been the case in the West.97

In chapter one I explore in more detail the clear difference between East and West in gendered approaches toward sport, establishing that it is partly on this basis that gymnastic success on each side of the Cold War originates.

There can be no doubt that the support for female sport in the East eventually caused renewed ways of thinking about women and sport in the West. In Cahn’s view, the Cold War’s impact on the West’s attitudes came very early: ‘The deficiencies of women’s track and field had been a minor matter in the past. But with the Soviet Union’s first Olympic appearance in 1952, these failings posed an acute problem for US politicians, sports leaders, and a patriotic public.’98 Yet, although the Soviets’ ample use of successful female athletes prompted much reflection on the state of women’s sport in the West, the response was a not a simple drive to improve female athletes’ lot. As Cahn demonstrated, black women were encouraged to perform in the male sphere of sport, successfully responding to challenges posed by Soviet women, without damaging the carefully constructed notions of white femininity.99 I explore in further detail in chapter two the way the Western media were able to continue their opposition to women’s sport in defiance of the evidence from the East and, in doing so, lose medals against the Soviet Union.100

97 Ibid., 195.
98 Cahn, Coming on Strong, 131.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 210.
Most of these gendered sporting practices were mediated and disseminated through the Olympic Games. In his work on women in the Olympics, Kevin Wamsley asserted:

…no institution has been so powerful as to structure both the nature of participation and performance, and to influence the consumption of women’s sport to such a degree. It was an Olympic culture… that actively promoted the feminized athletes, while tolerating but systematically criticizing those who participated in traditional men’s events or who did not exude the typically expected feminine traits. As Olympic culture had normalized the class hierarchies of the gentleman amateur earlier in the century, so too did it normalize a hierarchy of social differences between men and women…

Several scholars have studied how athletes were portrayed in the gendered sporting spectacle on the Olympic stage. Cahn found that no longer were American women deemed ‘unsexed’ or ‘mannish’; instead these slurs were projected onto Soviet athletes. Yet popular though this image of ‘butch’ Soviet females might be, historian Stephen Wagg found little evidence for it when he went searching for it in British media. Moreover, as I will demonstrate in chapter two, such de-sexing did not apply to Soviet athletes exclusively. Chapter two builds on Wamsley’s understandings of femininity as central to portrayals of women athletes:

Sexualised representations and the focus on beauty and grace offset period fears of the masculinization process supposedly engendered through participation in sport … If female athletes could be beautiful, graceful, and heterosexual,

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102 Cahn, Coming on Strong, 133.

103 Wagg, "If You Want the Girl Next Door..." Olympic Sport and the Popular Press in Early Cold War Britain.'
participate in gender-appropriate sports, and eventually be good wives and mothers, then their participation in sport did not compromise traditionally accepted gender orders … A feminised athlete could not challenge the celebration of manhood through sport, and thus did not displace men as the ‘real’ athletes of the era.¹⁰⁴

One of the best examples of the way women were ushered towards appropriate feminine sports was gymnastics. In arguing that Soviet women’s sporting success allowed Western counterparts to gain more attention and acceptance, Riordan suggested that gymnasts like Olga Korbut and Nellie Kim allayed concerns over sport’s masculinizing effect and proved women could be triumphant in the world of sport.¹⁰⁵ Implicit in this trend is a contradiction central to the sport and a common theme throughout this thesis: WAG helped women’s sport by demonstrating that women could retain their femininity as athletes; yet it suggested the sport must be suitably feminine to do so. While Riordan examined Soviet sport in general, my own research looks more closely at the way Soviet gymnastic stars affected the sport in the West, tracing their influence from chapter three onwards.

**Gymnastics**

While several scholars have approached gymnastics in terms of physical activity,¹⁰⁶ there is a gap in the literature on sport history when it comes to gymnastics. As a result, some of the sources here are journalistic and (auto)biographical, popular

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¹⁰⁵ Riordan, 'The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia and the U.S.S.R.,' 195.

¹⁰⁶ Pfister, *Gymnastics, a Transatlantic Movement: From Europe to America.*
nonfiction works. In general, such texts offer a narrative aimed at general readers, with little analysis or interpretation included. Nonetheless, the informative detail in most relevant popular histories means they can be used as virtual reference books. For example, Minot Simons’ extremely detailed history of WAG from 1966 – 1974 provides a factual foundation on which historical analysis can be built by examining wider contexts. At the same time biographies and autobiographies offer different perspectives to complement the primary sources used in this thesis.

In addition to passing comments in works on ‘feminine sport,’ there are several academic works devoted to WAG. Most salient is Roslyn Kerr’s 2003 Master’s thesis, and the resulting article, in which she traces the evolution of WAG. Using archived Codes of Points, and analysing video footage of medal-winning routines, Kerr observed key changes to the sport. For example she noted the change toward dangerously lean body types in the late 1970s and early 1980s also reflected new notions of femininity promoted by fashion models of the time.

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109 Kerr, 'The Evolution of Women's Artistic Gymnastics since 1952.'


111 Ibid., 97.
Moreover, her argument that Korbut and Nadia Comaneci introduced a new style of gymnastics and were responsible for popularizing it in the West is an extremely important observation, referred to throughout this research. Constructed around an entirely new set of sources, this thesis not only builds on her work and attempts to fill some of these gaps, it also covers some of the issues raised in Kerr’s authoritative work from new perspectives. For instance, using the Code of Points to narrate changes to the skills of the sport does not offer any insight into why such changes appeared in the rulebook. In this research, I go behind the scenes to the meetings where the rule makers made such decisions in order to broaden understandings of WAG’s history. Furthermore, Kerr’s sources have resulted in what at times is an insular history. I attempt to expand on her work by contextualizing gymnastics in the political and cultural climate of the Cold War, as well as shedding light on its complicated relationship with the Olympic movement.

Although Natalie Barker-Ruchti is primarily concerned with contemporary WAG, her research into its past is also relevant. A Foucauldian scholar, Barker-Ruchti has been concerned with the gymnast’s body, observing the way it moved from womanly to childlike from the 1960s to the 1970s. Her suggestion that this was in part due to a process of acrobatization\(^\text{112}\) is particularly important as an introduction to a period when the very concept of WAG became increasingly acrobatic, a theme developed in much greater detail in chapter three of this thesis. She argued that the process was compounded by the exhaustion of possibilities in the

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 58. Acrobatization is not an English word, presumably because it is jargon referring to the gymnastics-specific phenomenon of the increasing emphasis on acrobatic skills in WAG (skills with flight/somersaulting/twisting) in place of dance elements. Barker-Ruchti also uses this term, drawing from the German equivalent (which does exist in common German language).
old balletic style of gymnastics and by inspiration from trends in men’s gymnastics (at a time when originality was rewarded in the sport).\textsuperscript{113} She also found evidence that when these trends began, the Russian Gymnastics Federation employed acrobatic specialists, often from circuses, to teach stunts to gymnasts and coaches. Domestically, in the Soviet Union the trend towards acrobatic gymnastics was fostered with a specific Code of Points that drove development by rewarding acrobatic skills more than the international Code.

According to Barker-Ruchti, it was important that acrobatization be somewhat veiled. Emphasis on childishness and drama prevented viewers from recognizing the strength, power and courage it took for the athletes to perform feats regarded as masculine. The focus on those distractions emphasized the feminine aspects of gymnastics and, in doing so, masked and compensated for the sport’s increasing masculinization through acrobatics.\textsuperscript{114}

Conspicuous throughout the work of Kerr and Barker-Ruchti is the remarkable attention given to WAG in the 1970s, while the other decades of its history have remained largely forgotten.\textsuperscript{115} In covering half a century of the sport’s development, I attempt to alleviate this problem. However, a third gymnastics scholar has stepped outside this time period to look at media portrayals of WAG. Using broadcast commentary, Ann Chisholm argued that gymnasts represent


\textsuperscript{114} Barker-Ruchti, *Women's Artistic Gymnastics*, 158.

\textsuperscript{115} Although Kerr’s thesis spans a similar timeframe to this research, she gives more emphasis to the 1970s than other decades.
conflicting ideals which reproduce American societal narratives.\textsuperscript{116} According to Chisholm, gymnasts oscillate between the dualities of ‘antisocial/social, deviant/normative, infrahuman/superhuman, feminine/masculine, foreign/domesticated, child/adult, perversion/normale, incivility/civility, and disqualified citizen/exemplary citizen’.\textsuperscript{117} These portrayals reflect a range of conflicting notions in society, some of which are socially acceptable while others are not. Barker-Ruchti and Julia Weber built on these binaries in their analysis of gymnastics photographs of the 1970s,\textsuperscript{118} finding that young and sexually immature gymnasts ‘fascinated’ Western audiences, yet they were sexualized in the photographic sports coverage.

Although Chisholm’s theory was developed to explain the popularity of 1990s gymnasts in America, her analysis has the potential to be applied more widely. For example, it can be used to explain the popularity of Korbut and Comaneci in the context of newly acrobatized WAG, in comparison to the public support for other pioneers of flight. ‘Flight’, said Chisholm, ‘promised to christen a new elite, superior men with unlimited potential equipped to conquer fear, nature, other nations…’\textsuperscript{119} Echoing the interpretations of other scholars, however, she believed flight had to be mitigated with ‘cuteness,’ an historically American concept, which served to enhance the spectacle of acrobatics performed by small, cute children (gymnasts).

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 415.
\textsuperscript{119} Chisholm, 'Acrobats, Contortionists, and Cute Children,' 420.
embellish the spectacular manoeuvres executed by acrobatic female gymnasts.\textsuperscript{120} Cuteness offset the masculine connotations of the increasingly risky and dynamic sport, while protecting (child) gymnasts from becoming objects of desire.

An earlier work of Chisholm’s on media portrayals of the 1996 US gymnastics team laid the groundwork for her analysis, by arguing that WAG is ‘an incarnation of nationalism that manifests traces of militarism - the historical weak links between women and military training in the US notwithstanding’.\textsuperscript{121} In winning its first Olympic team gold medal, the American team was glorified in the media as though they had won a military victory on the front line. But the idea of preadolescent girls defending the nation is clearly at odds with traditional notions of militarism. Even while describing gymnasts from the 1996 games as ‘courageous,’ ‘disciplined,’ and ‘fighters,’ the media reminded the public that they were vulnerable children.\textsuperscript{122} Chisholm traces the roots of these perceptions to the origins of American gymnastics in the nineteenth century, when the aim was to create white, bourgeois females producing favourable conditions for reproduction.\textsuperscript{123} This interpretation of the reasons for women’s involvement in the sport recurs in the detailed examination of the international contexts discussed in chapters throughout this thesis.

Beyond studies of gender and WAG, there are also some shorter works that point to how gymnastics specifically was used in the Cold War. For example,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 128-129.
\end{itemize}
although it was contemporary research that did not attempt to position WAG within the Cold War, Mary O’Brien’s work on the reasons behind the success of the Soviet gymnastics system in the late 1970s demonstrates American admiration of Soviet gymnastics, in spite of the Cold War.\footnote{124 O'Brien, 'An Investigation of the Processes Which Produce Elite Women Gymnasts in the U.S.S.R..'} Wendy Varney’s analysis reinterpreted their training as ‘patriotic labour’.\footnote{125 Wendy Varney, 'A Labour of Patriotism,' Genders Online Journal, no. 39 (2004): 1.} And, in a manner similar to the assertion of Riordan and Dufraisse,\footnote{126 Riordan, Sport in Soviet Society; and Dufraisse, 'Les « Héros Du Sport » : La Fabrique De L’élite Sportive Soviétique (1934-1980).'} Varney saw the accomplishments of elite female gymnastics harnessed to a range of purposes: the establishment of a particular ideal for Soviet womanhood, provision of cultural gloss, distortion to compensate for domestic failings within the USSR, and to serve the needs of foreign policy – the latter point I expand on in chapter five.

Meanwhile gymnastics also reflected tensions \textit{within} the Eastern bloc. While I touch on this in chapters three to five, Mihaela Andra Wood’s thesis is entirely devoted to explaining how WAG became a defining feature of Romanian national identity during the Cold War. She found that gymnastics victories were the ultimate expressions of ‘Romanian-ness’ against Soviet encroachment.\footnote{127 Mihaela Andra Wood, 'Superpower: Romanian Women's Gymnastics During The Cold War,' (Ph.D. thesis) University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010.} These works legitimize the notion that the Cold War and WAG are two interrelated issues in history, but differ in geographic scope and detail from this research.

Most of the secondary literature also pays little or no attention to the context of the Olympic movement, the family in which WAG grew up and whose struggles were intrinsically tied to the sport. It is crucial that such considerations be brought
into the discussion of WAG. Thus, in chapter three I show that the Olympic influence was at work behind the rule changes of the 1970s; and it became increasingly important when WAG became the subject of public scrutiny near the end of the century, as I discuss in chapter eight.

One of the first examples of the emerging negative press is journalist Adrienne Blue’s 1987 work on WAG. While she concurred with Barker-Ruchti and Chisholm’s ideas about acrobatization and the accompanying attempts to mask masculinity, she alleged that they signified the devaluing of femininity. In chapter three I use sources from the FIG itself to challenge Blue's contention that she had identified a process that inhibited women’s rights and girls’ physical development and promoted eating disorders.\(^\text{128}\) Her criticisms are problematic not only because of the assumptions she makes about devalued femininity, but also because she demonstrates only a superficial understanding of WAG, confusing basic terms.\(^\text{129}\)

Her work inadvertently set the tone for the one of the most prominent works on gymnastics: Joan Ryan’s 1995 exposé.\(^\text{130}\) Claiming to have interviewed over 100 athletes, parents and coaches in WAG and figure skating, Ryan presented an entirely negative depiction of both sports. Indeed, one of the interviewees later published an article attempting to dispel some of the myths Ryan allegedly created.\(^\text{131}\)

While the credibility of Ryan’s work is questionable, the impact of her book requires that it be analysed in further detail. She outlines the changes in American gymnastics brought on by the arrival of the Romanian Károlyis: the US began to win

\(^{128}\) Blue, *Grace under Pressure*.
\(^{129}\) For example, she discusses a ‘dismount routine;’ two mutually exclusive terms. Ibid., 156.
medals internationally and American coaches picked up on the Eastern bloc methods of training elite gymnasts. Failing to acknowledge wife Marta Karolyi’s work, she credits Bela Károlyi with introducing to America the now-common practice of holding two workouts a day and training six days a week. Displaying the common suspicion towards former Eastern bloc migrants, she alleges that his more structured and less forgiving training system spawned a new generation of American coaches who screamed, taunted and demanded absolute subservience.\textsuperscript{132} Ryan makes clear throughout her work that such changes amount to child abuse. Her voice was the loudest in a new way of writing about gymnastics in the 1990s, which I discuss in chapter eight, arguing that it was such criticism that prompted reflection and change within the sport.

While Kerr gave a temporally broad, insular study of the history of WAG, Barker-Ruchti’s work predominantly related to the body, and Chisholm focused on media portrayals in the US. My research draws on each of these works, attempting to add nuanced contextual insight into the history of WAG on a more global scale. More important, none of those three writers nor any others have examined the role of governing bodies in gymnastics, and none have accessed the primary documentary materials housed at the FIG and IOC. Combined with new oral history sources, and drawing on newspapers, my research covers new ground in the history of WAG.

**Methodology**

This research uses the conceptual framework of the Cold War to analyse a variety of archival, media, and oral sources uncovered for the first time. Two separate trips to the Olympic Studies Centre (OSC) in Lausanne allowed access to unpublished

archival sources of both the IOC, its National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and the FIG. They included correspondence, statements, and policy documents and minutes from Olympic sessions. The OSC shares Lausanne with the FIG, who also provided access to published (although not widely disseminated) primary sources: minutes, summaries and reports from FIG meetings. These have been drawn on extensively throughout this research, as they provide deep background information on much of the development of WAG during this period, and the motivations behind it.

Historians Dave Day and Wray Vamplew cautioned, ‘decisions as to what is important enough to be archived are often discriminatory, excluding the voices of subordinate groups’. Indeed this is particularly the case with the FIG bulletins, and the incomplete correspondence files between the FIG and IOC, which form the bulk of archival sources for this work. However, drawing on other resources assists in mitigating this problem.

While visits to the archives in Lausanne have been essential, digitization now helps to overcome geographic barriers to archival access, allows examination of unexpected archives, and makes new material available to historians. Within gymnastics, the Australian Gymnastics Federation’s (AGF) magazine, the *Australian Gymnast*, has been used to represent views and changes specifically in Australian gymnastics, while United States Association of Gymnastics’ (USAG – formerly the United States Gymnastics Federation) ‘Legacy’ website made available their

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133 Although I was able to access these records at the FIG, there are rumoured to be further unpublished archives held at the previous headquarters in Moutier, which the FIG is reluctant to open to researchers.


federations' views on historical issues in gymnastics, as well as access to previous versions of the *International Gymnast*. All such newspapers and magazines could be consulted online, while missing issues of the *International Gymnast* were available at various libraries in Perth. Outside the gymnastics community, digitized print media were consulted to reflect the public mood on sporting issues. The *New York Times* was used in place of a national American newspaper to represent American public views because of its prestigious status as a ‘paper of record’ that influenced the reporting and agenda of other Western publications. Meanwhile, the *Trove* database in the National Library of Australia assisted research on Australian public views by enabling access to all major Australian newspapers.

Unlike documentary archives, which have often been selectively curated, are incomplete, and privilege certain documents and views, newspapers offer a less filtered picture of the past. In this case the contemporary filtering of newspapers becomes a bountiful source of enquiry into how and why certain beliefs were privileged. Sport was mediated through newspaper reportage, framing popular understandings particularly of Olympic sport, a world foreign to the experience of most of the public. As Johnes put it: ‘The press thus contributed to, rather than

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139 Day and Vamplew, 'Sports History Methodology.'

140 Johnes, 'Archives and Historians of Sport.'
just reported, local perceptions and understandings of sporting culture. That is, reporting – editorial and opinion pieces included – told readers what to think about, and suggested how they thought about these issues. Whether readers were in agreement or not, the existence of such texts was intended to guide public opinion. Bernard Cohen quipped that the press ‘may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.’

In addition to such texts, eight oral histories were also conducted for this research. Through my own connections as a former international gymnast representing New Zealand, as well as the connections of those I met in Perth – notably Liz Chetkovich, the high performance manager of Gymnastics Australia – and at the FIG, I was able to interview several top-level international coaches, judges and officials who had been active for a significant portion of this period. Each had held national team coaching positions, international judging qualifications, or FIG office, and the participants came from an array of countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the former Soviet Union. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed, conversational style to allow emerging lines of enquiry to be pursued, and participants were asked a series of wide ranging questions about their background in the sport, their experiences in different sports systems, interactions with gymnastics representatives from other nations, the changes they have witnessed, and their opinions on the influence of various historical issues (including the Cold War), and organizations.

141 Ibid., 1785.
142 Chari, 'Representation or Misrepresentation?' 335.
This research has also employed several unique historical frameworks. First, unlike the existing scholarship on WAG, this project utilizes the Olympic movement as a framework within which WAG developed. In doing so, it places IOC and FIG governance at the centre of inquiry. Second, it employs the framework of the Cold War to understand the history of sport. It is surprising that this framework has not been used to explore WAG, one of the most popular Olympic sports, whose key players came from the polarized powers central to the conflict. Finally, it focuses on women’s participation in the Olympic movement. WAG enabled female competitors earlier than many other sports did, and was subject to the influences of Cold War politics. Yet most existing scholarship on the Cold War and the Olympics focuses on male-dominated sports.

**Scope**

Commencing with 1952 – the first WAG competition as well as the Soviet Union’s first appearance at the Olympic Games – this research spans the rest of the century to end in 2000, ten years after the end of the Cold War. Geographically it is concerned primarily with the West: the United States of America and Australia. These nations and their gymnastics are framed against the Eastern bloc, for which linguistic difference prevented pursuit of primary sources. Throughout this work, ‘Eastern bloc’ is a general term used to encompass the general region of Eastern Europe governed by communism and influenced by the Soviet Union. Throughout this thesis it is used as a catchall to mean primarily the Soviet Union and Romania – the two nations of that region that have dominated WAG. On the Western front, the choice of the USA is apt in the Cold War context, as the opposing key player against the Soviet Union (and its bloc). In this thesis, the terms US, USA, and American(s) are
used to refer to this country. The US is important not only as the adversary of the Soviet Union both politically and in the sporting context of the Cold War, but also in terms of its progression in gymnastics throughout this period – from virtual irrelevance to world’s best. Finally, while other nations might have been used as Cold War partners of the United States, a number of factors, in addition to the convenience of the author’s location, justify the choice of Australia as the other representative of ‘the West’.

Australia's loyalty to the United States throughout the Cold War was greater than any other country's. Even during the brief period of Gough Whitlam's Labor government in the early 1970s, the United States retained satellite monitoring bases on Australian soil with a vital defensive role against possible incoming missiles. A station in Western Australia providing underwater communication with submarines armed with Polaris and later Poseidon missiles that made them the main American strike weapon in a nuclear war. Unlike Britain and Canada, which also hosted American bases, Australia supported the US war in Vietnam. New Zealand also sent troops to Vietnam but its refusal to accept nuclear-armed or powered US warships led to its exclusion from the ANZUS alliance, making Australia undoubtedly the United States' most loyal Cold War ally. Yet Australia's fragmented sporting culture prompted a response to the Eastern bloc success and eventually to the opportunities caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union very different from that of the United States. Although the development of gymnastics was a challenge to both countries – and both would eventually use imported Eastern bloc coaches – there was no chance that the United States would abandon uncompromising anti-communist ideology to

introduce a national sports system strongly influenced by Soviet methods, as the AIS was.

The decision to preserve the variations in spelling between the two countries in the quotation of primary sources was my own, but the varying availability of sources that helped shape the scope of the research depended in some cases on the attitudes of others. While documents from the AGF and USAG were available online, it was only people from the former who were willing to assist with oral histories. The essential focus on sporting archives made the scope more transnational: interested organizations in different nations send delegates to the FIG, and the IOC representatives to interested nations, but these INGOs belong to no nation.

**Organization**

The thesis is arranged by decade into four parts, and the chapters within each deal with certain themes. Part One is less concerned with WAG specifically than attempting to establish the conditions in which the sport was born. It begins with a discussion of the Soviet entry to the Olympic movement, and the amateur context in which the Games operated for the next twenty years under Avery Brundage. A following chapter details how women’s sport was characterized as a Cold War issue by the *New York Times*. Part Two looks to the 1970s; the how and why of acrobatization is explored in chapter three, and the diplomatic tours that resulted from this trend in chapter four. In Part Three, chapter five takes a step back from gymnastics, examining the political boycotts that permeated the Olympics of the 1980s, before their impact on gymnastics, as well as new professional activities and immigration is assessed in chapter six. Finally, Part Four examines how the
aftermath of the Cold War affected gymnastics, through increased migration and decentralized power, processes that put WAG on the path towards abandoning perfect scores. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that as much as WAG reflected the tensions of the Cold War, it also revealed the complexities of international governance in a globalizing world, where the path for sport was divided by individuals with shared enthusiasm but representing warring nations.

Notes on WAG

Due to WAG’s highly specialized nature, it is necessary to offer some explanation about the complex rules and jargon of the sport. First, and perhaps most confusingly, there are no steadfast rules. Every four years, the Code of Points, gymnastics’ ‘rulebook’ is rewritten, and the judges, gymnasts and fans need to relearn the requirements and strategize how to capitalize on the desired movements. Nonetheless, there are some basic guidelines that repeatedly appear. For example, straight legs, pointed toes and ‘stuck’ landings have always been hallmarks of excellent execution, but the required elements and their values have been changed by the WTC each quadrennium. Throughout the period with which this research is concerned, routines were designed to be given a score out of 10 – how this score was reached by the gymnasts was an ever changing benchmark that is discussed further in this thesis. A panel of judges (different numbers at different points in history) each gave a secret score, and these were collated and averaged before the final score was received. As this research will illustrate, it was only later in gymnastics’ history that individual judges’ scores were revealed.

In the gymnastics competitions there are three types of medals: medals for the highest score on an individual apparatus; for the most prestigious All-Around
competition – the sum of a gymnast’s apparatus scores; and for the team competition – the sum of each gymnast's All-Around score in a team’s All-Around total. Early in WAG’s history, results were determined by adding together the scores from the compulsory, prescribed routines with those for the optional routines the gymnasts performed on each apparatus. Later on, separate competitions were formed that would have been comparable to the qualification heats and finals of other sports if, for example, sprinters' qualification times were added to their final times to achieve the final rankings. It was only near the end of this period that an entirely separate round of competition was introduced. All of these trends will be explained throughout this work.

As gymnastics developed, more and more ‘elements’ (individual movements) were added to the dictionary of the sport's skills, and named after their first performers. As a result, a transcription of a routine can often seem like a language of its own. To avoid, as much as possible, using gymnastics jargon, I have opted to describe the elements where needed instead.

**Terminology**

Within this work, there are several key terms and events that are used to delineate the sport. First, it is important to note that ‘gymnastics’ refers to general physical movements and competitions often overseen by the FIG (including Men’s Artistic Gymnastics [MAG], Rhythmic, and Trampoline), while WAG refers specifically to Women’s Artistic Gymnastics. In this thesis, both gymnastics and WAG are usually meant in the elite context: that of world championship and Olympic level sport, not the recreational activities often practised by young children.
Much of this work deals with the organizations governing gymnastics at various levels. The acronyms are explained in the text and in the list of abbreviations, however it is worth noting that both the USGF and USAG refer to the same organization representing American gymnastics which changed its name, as does the AAGU and the AGF, which served as the Australian equivalent. I have maintained the name under which each was operating each time it is referenced. At the highest level, the IOC oversees the FIG’s work, while both organizations oversee the work of their national representing bodies. In both organizations there is a presidential figurehead usually representing certain ideologies and policies, beneath which lie specialized committees. Within the FIG, first is the Executive Committee (EC) which sits directly below the President and is made up of a group of international gymnastics officials. Second is the Women’s Technical Committee (WTC), which sits beneath the EC, parallel to the Men’s Technical Committee (MTC), and is solely responsible for creating and upholding the rules of WAG, notwithstanding any directives from the EC, FIG President, or IOC. Nearly always consisting of women, like the EC the WTC is made up of an elected group of international gymnastics officials, although to be nominated for a position one had to hold an international judging qualification.
At its inception, and for most of its first two decades, WAG was an amalgamation of classical dance and a version of men’s gymnastics adapted from its militaristic roots to be more suitable for women. The nations that first enjoyed success in the sport drew upon strong cultural backgrounds in these activities to achieve their victories. Former Soviet ballerina Larissa Latynina was the reigning champion throughout most of this period,\textsuperscript{145} and her closest competitors from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany and Romania were similarly versed in dance, or came from countries with strong gymnastic traditions. Meanwhile most Western countries had few competitive female gymnasts; and the disinterest in the sport resulted in a paucity of East-West Cold War interaction in WAG in the 1950s and 1960s. Oral histories confirmed this, with one person commenting: ‘You go to the ‘50s and ‘60s and there was so little international contact, international competition. It was more so within Europe. When did North America ever compete against the Soviet Union? They had the occasional tour, but it just didn’t happen.’\textsuperscript{146}

Nevertheless, the Cold War did influence Olympic sport and women’s sport in general, and such a combination of gender and politics shall be the focus of the following two chapters. For it was in such a context that WAG developed from a marginalized balletic sport to a dynamic mainstream event. To understand this context as it was perceived in the West, this part uses American and Australian newspapers to assess the sentiment surrounding the three main issues of Olympic

\textsuperscript{145} Such was Latynina’s dominance across all apparatus at successive Olympics that she held the record for most Olympic medals at 18 for nearly 50 years until she was finally surpassed by American Michael Phelps in 2012.

\textsuperscript{146} Hardy Fink, interviewed by Georgia Cervin, (Nanning, China), 5 October 2014.
sport in these two decades. First, the Soviet entry into the Olympic Movement prompted fears over the monolith’s intentions and abilities in sport. Second, it caused renewed concerns over the concept of amateurism – one of the fundamental pillars of Olympism – the philosophy of the Olympic Movement – at the time. And finally, women’s sport was already a contentious issue as the IOC had permitted female athletes to participate in some sports, but the Soviet Union’s employment of such a large number of women athletes, who were responsible for a large portion of the Soviet Union’s overall sporting success, saw women’s sport become a Cold War issue as well as an Olympic one. Throughout this period, such issues were entangled with the IOC’s domineering leader, Avery Brundage, whose leadership is better understood through examination of the man himself, which forms a secondary layer of these two chapters.

These themes are all considered through the way in which they were represented in Western media to determine the public feeling toward them. The reportage of these issues has significant implications for the way in which WAG grew and developed globally, and as such serves as an important case study in the power of media discourse on social barriers to inclusion in and promotion of (certain) sport(s). These chapters are based on sources from prominent print media of the time: the *New York Times* is used in place of a national newspaper to represent American views, and similarly the *Trove* database has enabled search of all regional newspapers in Australia to gauge public sympathies there. Such a comparison has its limitations in the differing nature of print media in the two countries at the time. While the *New York Times* is a regional newspaper, its prestige and wide dissemination allow it to stand in place as an almost national newspaper for the United States. Meanwhile, there was no national newspaper in Australia at this time,
and indeed no frontrunner in terms of reach or esteem. Rather, Australian newspapers tended to represent the capital cities of each state. Furthermore, much of the early Australian reportage consists of verbatim press releases from American newswires such as the Associated Press. Despite these issues, there are some clear generalizations to be made about Australian perspectives of amateurism in contrast with American views. It is notable that throughout the Australian states, newspapers were selective in their reprinting of such pieces, suggesting different focuses of interest for Australian sport. Then, as Australian newspapers began to employ sports journalists in imitation of the likes of the *New York Times*’ Arthur Daley, it is remarkable that Australian views shifted away from emphasizing Eastern bloc cheating, instead refocusing on problems in American sport.

First, chapter one demonstrates the Australian reportage of the Brundage years, the issues deemed controversial and interesting enough to report on, with particular reference to amateurism and ‘state-amateurs’ introduced by the Eastern bloc. Second, this is compared and contrasted with the American media portrayals of these issues. In neither of these countries did support for amateurism remain static; so thirdly, I discuss the growing calls in both countries for an end to amateurism as a way to counter the Soviet Union’s growing domination across all sports due to their use of state-amateurs. In chapter two, similar debates arise concerning women athletes and the Soviet Union’s success because of them. From ‘dreamboats’ to ‘Amazons,’ I suggest that commentaries surrounding women athletes were in fact subtle ripostes to Soviet sporting success in an effort to create alternative narratives in which the West remained Olympic victors. All of these themes shaped the Olympic sporting landscape in the 1950s and 1960s, creating the setting for WAG’s subsequent development.
Chapter One

‘The Games Operate on an Honour System’: Avery Brundage’s Amateur Olympics

With a World War Two military and civilian death toll estimated at 27 million, it is hardly surprising that the Soviet Union did not compete in the London Olympics in 1948, despite the Russian Empire’s presence at the 1900, 1908 and 1912 Games. On the 27th of December, 1951, the Soviet Union announced its intention to compete in its first Olympic Games at Helsinki the following year.147 This marked the Games’ transformation to a site of Cold War contest, rivalry between East and West raising tensions at the quadrennial Games. A threatened US feared the USSR would not have entered if it doubted its chances of domination.148 These concerns proved true at the second post-war Games in 1952, where the Soviet Union finished with 22 gold medals to the United States’ 40, yet with an overall medal total of 71 – only five medals behind its now implacable Cold War adversary. Clearly ahead of the United States in 1956 – with 37 to 32 gold and 98 to 74 overall medals – the Soviet Union had become an athletic powerhouse that Western critics saw as the product of intense training in a full-time, government funded sporting system. Soviet athletes were professionals.


Soviet sporting victories were not only challenged by American athletes, but by concerted efforts designed to undermine and discredit its sporting success. One such way was through press reportage, which focused on amateurism as a form of cheating. The idea of Soviet cheating pervaded East-West sporting meets throughout the Cold War, coming to a head at each quadrennial Olympics and in the behind the scenes negotiations at the IOC. But ironically, the man held most responsible for allowing this flouting of Olympic ideals was the long-serving American President of the IOC, Avery Brundage. In an era when McCarthyism flourished in the United States and the Menzies government failed narrowly to outlaw the Communist Party in Australia, Soviet participation in the Olympic movement was possible only because the IOC stood aloof from the international tensions that reached a peak in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. For them, sport transcended politics, while paradoxically acting as a vehicle for world peace. In this context the willingness of the IOC to accept Soviet athletes as amateurs prompted intense contemporary and subsequent criticism of its leader, Brundage.

Several academics, however, have questioned those criticisms, challenging the hitherto assumed innocence of Western athletes, while vast and systematic funding supported Soviet sports programmes. The Brundage era understanding of professionalism encompassed a broad range of activities and payments for athletes: it was forbidden to benefit in any way from participating in sport. In theory, this not only prevented financial support for training, sponsorship deals, advertising and the like, but also payment for work as a coach or even material gifts to reward athletic success.¹⁴⁹ But the Soviet Union was not unique in its assistance (medical, lifestyle

or financial) to athletes. ‘The practice of state funding’, suggested historian Toby Rider, ‘had been in existence long before the Cold War, and countries that would commonly be called ‘democratic’ undertook it’.\textsuperscript{150} Thus the belief that Avery Brundage and his IOC’s policies on amateurism enabled Soviet Olympic victories requires further assessment.

This chapter aims to compare the public sentiment surrounding amateurism, and accompanying issues with Soviet sport, with Brundage and the IOC’s management of it. It asks how amateurism was understood in Australia, America, and the IOC, and how perceptions towards it shifted in light of Cold War Olympics. It then places these critiques alongside shifts in the Olympic gymnastics programme. I argue anti-amateurism rhetoric in the West gave firm support to Brundage’s crusade, until it became apparent that some degree of professionalism was needed to outperform the USSR. First to observe this was Australia, who appraised the American collegiate system as professional as the Soviet system, before American reportage too shifted away from the amateur sports model.

\textbf{Avery Brundage}

While studying at the University of Illinois, Brundage, a Chicagoan, began his athletic career as a track and field athlete, peaking at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, where he placed fifth in the pentathlon and fourteenth in the decathlon. These events were both won by his teammate, Jim Thorpe, who was famously stripped of his medals when officials learned that he played semi-professional baseball two years before the Olympics. During his time as IOC President, Brundage rebuffed several attempts to have Thorpe’s medals reinstated, and it was not until

\textsuperscript{150} Rider, ‘The Olympic Games and the Secret Cold War,’ 119.
Juan Antonio Samaranch’s presidency in 1982 that this would transpire. Perhaps this incident, in which Brundage had a personal involvement with ‘cheating,’ spurred the relentless pursuit of amateurism that marked his career in the Olympic movement.

While fostering his own highly successful construction business, upon his retirement from athlete competition, he became involved in sports administration, first as a member of the AAU before later becoming its President. From there he entered the American Olympic Association, becoming its president too, which allowed him a seat at the IOC, in which he would rise to Vice President in 1946, and eventually President, from 1952 to 1972.

As historian Richard Mandell suggested in a New York Times article: ‘Brundage’s hatred of professional sport was understandable in the light of his youth and that Brundage was consistently idealistic’. But although Brundage was often criticized for his efforts to ensure the rules were strictly upheld, after his death The New York Times admitted: ‘He was frequently cast as the villain in incidents in which he was blameless. He often was glorified for unswerving devotion to amateurism when in truth he had saved Olympic ideals and nurtured the Olympic Games themselves through skilful compromise.’

Australian Reportage on the Early Brundage Years

In the late 1940s and 1950s, criticism of the IOC President was almost a sport in itself. Most articles about Brundage and amateurism in Australian newspapers were reprinted wires from American journalists, many of which only repeated varied criticisms of the man. In 1953 Brisbane’s Courier-Mail summarized Brundage for

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Australian readers as follows:

In the 24 years since he took over leadership of America’s Olympic Games organization from General Douglas MacArthur, he has already been called ‘the meanest man in sport,’ the ‘apostle of hypocrisy,’ a snob, a stuffed shirt, and a tyrant with a discus where his heart should be. He has been abused on the floor of Canada’s Parliament. Russia has called him a dictator.\(^{153}\)

Most papers were keen to portray Brundage as the ‘apostle of amateurism’ who spoiled the standard of the Games by preventing talented Western athletes from participating. For instance, as President of the American Olympic Committee he was harshly criticized for dismissing Eleanor Holm Jarrett from the US Olympic team in 1936 for her antics on the ship to the Games.\(^{154}\) She was accused of being so inebriated she was near comatose, and the team doctor diagnosed her with acute alcoholism.\(^{155}\) Holm maintained that she had simply had ‘a few’ glasses of champagne and refused the chaperone’s request that she retire at 9pm. She contended that the team doctor, chaperone and Brundage conspired to have her thrown out to set an example for expected athlete behaviour, despite her teammates protests.\(^{156}\) Jarrett had been expected to win a medal, and the public reaction was one of disapproval. Historian Allen Guttmann observed that since the incident, Brundage has forever been cast as a ‘killjoy in sport’,\(^{157}\) while social scientists Kristine Toohey and Anthony James Veal cite the incident as an example of women contesting

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153 R. MacDonald, 'We Should Watch This Man,' *Courier-Mail*, 18 March 1953.
154 'Olympics Chief Is Often the Meanest Man in Sport,' *Examiner*, 22 January 1953.
Olympic barons’ narrow confines of femininity and frailty.\textsuperscript{158}

In the decades following, more ammunition for Brundage’s charge as ‘the meanest man in sport’ arose. For instance, in 1947 Brundage warned Canadian figure skater Barbara Ann Scott that if she accepted the car gifted by an admirer, it might compromise her amateur status.\textsuperscript{159} A decade later, American athlete Wes Santee was portrayed as the unfortunate victim of Brundage’s policies. Australian reporter Ken Moses grumbled:

So poor old Wes, the Marine who was going to play the merry dickens with Landy’s mile record, has been singled out as the scapegoat for accepting expenses, which everyone in the track and field game knows has been the usual American hand-out to its stars for years.\textsuperscript{160}

Despite the recent Soviet arrival to the Games, by 1956 Australia was clearly already feeling disadvantaged due to American violations of amateurism. Brundage’s blindness to national borders when it came to accusations of amateurism, did little to win him the love of the media and the public in either country, prompting one Australian newspaper to reflect: ‘His refusal to compromise his principles has made him, at times, the most unpopular man in sport’.\textsuperscript{161}

While Brundage was clearly an easy scapegoat, only a few years later Australians were relatively unconcerned with his handling of the Soviet entry into the Olympic movement and their questionable amateur standing. By the latter half of the 1950s American violations of amateurism were receiving as much, if not more, coverage in Australian newspapers than questions of Soviet professionalism.


\textsuperscript{159}‘Olympics Chief Is Often the Meanest Man in Sport.’

\textsuperscript{160}Ken Moses, ‘Why Keep It Quiet?’, \textit{Argus}, 7 March 1956.

\textsuperscript{161}‘Olympics Chief Is Often the Meanest Man in Sport.’
American Media and The Soviet Union Entrance to the Olympics

As the 1952 Olympics loomed, the Soviets’ debut was met with cavalier disregard by the United States. Prominent New York Times columnist, Arthur Daley, quickly dismissed them:

The most baffling question is this: Why is the Soviet entered? The corollary, of course, is: Why is the Soviet exposing itself to the pitiless spotlight of the sports carnival? Performance alone counts, not words. And it seems inconceivable that the Russians can outscore the United States…\(^{162}\)

Despite his underestimation of Soviet athleticism, Daley went on to illustrate the Soviets’ poor sportsmanship with a number of examples, in what was arguably a pre-emptive defence against a chance American defeat. For instance, the Soviets ‘…arrived on the scene for the weight-lifting championships and then sat it out in the grandstand as spectators. They just didn’t figure to win and hence withdrew’.\(^{163}\) In short, if the Soviets were to win it would be because they were poor sports or cheating, not because they might have better athletes than the USA.

Soviet Professionalism versus American ‘Amateurism’

In addition to implying Soviet victories were achieved due to poor sportsmanship, American media also devalued them by suggesting they were result of professionalism. Rider argued that amateurism had always been a minor issue, until it was given a ‘Cold War flavour’.\(^{164}\) Indeed, here it is seen that as soon as the USSR became involved in the Olympic movement, allegations in American media sought to undermine a Soviet victory. As long as amateur rules were in place American

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\(^{162}\) Daley, 'The Olympic Enigma.'

\(^{163}\) Ibid.

\(^{164}\) Rider, 'The Olympic Games and the Secret Cold War,' 119.
media persistently questioned the amateur status of Soviet athletes – an ironic stance considering Brundage’s aforementioned persecution due to his strict enforcement of amateurism. Nonetheless the IOC, under Brundage’s leadership, was keen to make sure that Olympic rules were understood and followed by all, and both American and Australian media closely monitored his efforts to ensure that they were.

*New York Times* reporter John Rendel highlighted Soviet professionalism on the eve of their entry to the Games: ‘The Russians admitted they had given cash prizes but said they would not do so in the future. They also admitted they had used training camps for athletes but intended to discontinue the practice.’\(^{165}\) Evidently the promise to cease such practices satisfied Brundage to allow their entry into the Games. ‘We had two avenues of approach to the application,’ mused Brundage. ‘Accept them at their word or go by what we had heard, that they were not living up to the rules and regulations.’\(^{166}\)

Brundage was well aware of the rumours surrounding Soviet sport practices, and had taken action to ensure they would adhere to the rules. Yet all Brundage had to work with was the Soviet Union’s promise of innocence. ‘We have asked the Russians what their rules are, but have received no answer and probably will get no information, so we’re taking them at their word.’\(^{167}\) Consequently, Brundage continued to keep a close eye on the development of Olympic sports in the East.

Only one year later in 1953, an American article claimed that Brundage was ‘disturbed by the trend toward “state amateurism” he had observed during a two-month tour of Europe,’ describing the subsidization of athletes as ‘scholarships on a

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\(^{166}\) Ibid.

\(^{167}\) ‘Soviet Assurance on Games Rulings,’ *Mercury*, 7 February 1952.
national scale’. Although the *New York Times* report referred particularly to ‘Iron Curtain countries,’ Brundage was fully aware that athlete subsidies were a double-edged sword. ‘It’s a dangerous thing,’ he said, ‘but as often as I criticize the practice I am told about American college football players and the scholarships they receive.’ Pursuit of Soviet student athletes would result in an equally regrettable situation for many American athletes.

The question of Soviet amateurism continued in news coverage in 1954, consoling Western readers that Soviet sporting supremacy could only be achieved through cheating. ‘As long as Russian athletes were not winning, Russia could get by with her strange notions of amateurism,’ declared the *New York Times*. ‘But no longer. Russia is winning, winning practically everything entered and it is a well known axiom that rules are more lax for losers than for winners.’ A narrative was being created in which Americans were the true victors in sport, having played by the rules. The *New York Times* contributed to this notion, reporting comments such as: ‘Many international officials agree that it is unfair to student amateur athletes and other young men and women who participate in athletics as pure amateurs to have to meet Russian “state amateurs” on an equal footing.’ Such reports allowed allegations of Soviet professionalism to undermine Soviet sporting victories in American eyes. As early as 1954, a new discourse was emerging in which the USA reigned supreme in the sporting world, either through outright victory, or victory by default due to Soviet cheating.

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169 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
To be fair, Brundage could not pursue the qualms of American media, as there was little evidence of Soviet cheating. In August 1954, Brundage ‘gave Russian athletics a clean bill of health as far as amateur status was concerned’.172 The head of Soviet sports, Nikolai Romanov, had given his word that the practice of cash payments, subsidies, financial inducements and other special awards to athletes had been suspended in the Soviet Union. When Brundage presented him with American press clippings alleging Soviet professionalism, Romanov insisted that ‘Russian athletes must place their education and their jobs ahead of sports’.173 ‘I have seen nothing in the Soviet Union that would make me question Romanov’s statement,’ said Brundage. 174 These sentiments were echoed in Australian newspapers too.175 Within the IOC archives, this method is a constant theme. Whenever newspaper allegations arose, Brundage took them to the Soviet NOC, who assured Brundage that the Soviet Union believed in and practiced amateurism.

As Brundage remarked on several occasions, most of the time there was little he could do but take sports representatives at their word. But in the case of allegations around 1954, he had just finished an extended tour and seen no indication of professionalism in the Soviet sports world. So at this time he was able to go further than repeating Romanov’s assurances to the press, and rely on his own observations of Eastern bloc sporting practices. ‘So far as I can determine … very few of the Russians are full-time athletes. The majority work or go to school. Of

174 ‘Athletics in Russia Impress Brundage.’
175 ‘Russians Endorse Sports Status,’ Mercury, 1 September 1954; and ‘Athletes Amateur in Russia,’ Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners’ Advocate, 1 September 1954.
course, there undoubtedly are some abuses in Russia as there are in all countries.\textsuperscript{176} This is unsurprising given the Soviets’ expertise at handling foreign visitors, allowing them to see only what they desired.\textsuperscript{177}

Such comments illuminate both Brundage’s acute awareness of Western allegations of Soviet cheating and his efforts to answer them in multiple ways: ensuring Olympic rules were upheld, warning the Soviet Union of their alleged breaches, and logging these statements should contradictory evidence come to light. Brundage argued that he had ‘brought back a statement from the Olympic head in Russia that they believe in the Olympic rules and follow them. Now we have this on record, and, if we find any abuses, we can go to headquarters.’\textsuperscript{178} He was doing his utmost to ensure that all nations upheld the amateurism rule, even if his utmost yielded only empty promises from an alien regime. ‘What was there for me to do then?’ he would lament later in 1959. ‘One man’s word against another. We [the Olympic Movement] have no police force, detectives or army’.\textsuperscript{179} Herein was the problem of the amateur rule: it would be hypocritical for the US to demand it be more rigorously policed, and impractical for the IOC in any case. Yet it was a constant source of concern and criticism for Brundage.

\textit{A Changing Tide}

Perhaps in response to the unwavering tide of complaints over amateurism, Brundage introduced new wording to the Olympic oath in 1956. While athletes had

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176} 'Brundage Praises Russian Athletes.'
\item \textsuperscript{177} Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen, \textit{Political Tourists: Travellers From Australia To The Soviet Union In The 1920s-1940s}, (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{178} Ibid. 'Brundage Praises Russian Athletes.'
\item \textsuperscript{179} Rider, 'The Olympic Games and the Secret Cold War,' 121.
\end{itemize}
always had to swear to their amateur status, Brundage added to the pledge a promise for athletes to remain amateur. But far from meeting the criticism over policing Eastern bloc amateurism, the reaction from athletes, coaches and officials was worldwide protest. One Australian athlete laughed: it was not legally binding – the only difference it would make is a ‘prick of the conscience’ if an athlete wanted to become, for example, a coach after the Games. Yet in an act hinting at the questionable amateurism of American athletes, the United States was the only country troubled enough by Brundage’s pledge to launch an official protest. ‘The United States… would be put in an unfortunate position if the full oath were required,’ reported one Reuters article in the Canberra Times. Indeed, Kenneth Wilson, President of United States Olympic Committee complained: ‘How about the many American Olympic athletes who plan coaching careers?’ When Brundage’s measure against professionalism came to affect American athletes, the rhetoric surrounding amateurism was altered. One New York Times columnist bemoaned: ‘Professional sports constitute an honorable and legitimate vocational field for thousands of young Americans. It is insulting and patronizing to imply that a professional athlete is beyond the pale of propriety.’ Quite plainly there was a double standard at play.

As the 1956 Games in Melbourne drew nearer, Australian newspapers too began to take greater interest in the amateurism issue, looking sharply at both Soviet athletes, and increasingly, Americans. Melbournians were concerned that

180 ‘Lifers’ Grin at Avery’s Rule...’ Argus, 3 August 1956.
181 ‘Games to Be Undefiled by Professionals,’ Canberra Times, 20 October 1956.
183 Ibid.
Brundage’s crusade would cause trouble at the Games, leaving the city to drown in the ‘odious backwash’. ‘We do not want Melbourne to be a political battle ground between November 22 and December 8 this year,’ worried Ken Moses.\(^{184}\) Until the 1956 Melbourne Games, Brundage’s criticism toward American athletics was considered a necessary ploy in order to get to the real targets: the Soviets.

Brundage is bitterly opposed to the Russian methods and the way it keeps its stars in training without having to work. He told us so himself when he was in Melbourne last year to shakeup our Games progress ... [He] knows full well he can’t tackle the Russians until he makes some pretence of putting his own house in order.\(^{185}\)

“Pretence” or not, it is clear that Brundage knew no borders when it came to pursuing infringements of the amateur rule.\(^{186}\) Yet after the 1956 Games, Australian media began to support Brundage’s pursuit of professional athletes in the US. During a trip to the United States, Moses, an Australian sports columnist, became much more convinced of American professionalism in sport, after witnessing the collegiate athletics system.

A New York man may run for California, while a Los Angeles youth may carry the colours of Oregon, depending on how well he could run and what inducement was made to him to study at that particular university... athletes had not come just to study, and authorities openly admit that athletics scholarships were handed out.\(^{187}\)

As a result of such open violations of amateurism, Moses began to assert that Brundage was too focused on professionalism elsewhere, and not doing enough to

\(^{184}\) Moses, 'Why Keep It Quiet?'.
\(^{185}\) Ibid.
\(^{186}\) Ibid.
prevent breaches of amateurism on home soil.

Don’t let anyone from the States - Avery Brundage, Dan Ferris included - try to kid you about a small matter of amateurism in American athletics. Because quite obviously these great stalwarts of amateurism wear specially constructed long-range spectacles with their line of vision guaranteed not to drop short anywhere within Uncle Sam’s territories. 188

Australian media began to endorse Brundage’s own view that abuse of amateurism was an issue that knew no borders, rather than being an exclusively Soviet manner of cheating. Indeed, Rider’s research not only confirmed professionalism as an international problem; according to him, it was ‘a matter cautiously avoided’ by propaganda experts in the State Department, as ‘the dubious status of college and military athletes left the U.S. open to a legitimate accusation of hypocrisy’. 189 While Australian newspapers began to note this inconsistency and Brundage’s challenge in dealing with it, it was not until the 1960s that such criticisms gained momentum in American newspapers.

Alternative Means of Criticizing Soviet Sport

Soviet success at the 1956 Games was downplayed again through the rhetoric of amateurism and its class connotations. It was not simply payments that were against the tenets of amateurism, it was also taking sport so seriously that training camps were used, supervised by teams of coaches, doctors, scientists and other such experts. Further, when athletes attended such camps, they received payments for

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188 Ibid.
‘broken time’ – a kind of paid leave for time away from their regular jobs. These issues were intertwined in US media, seeing amateurism in finances as well as the facilities, funding and organization of the national sports programmes in the East:

How can nations whose teams do not have unlimited funding behind them and which draw a line of demarcation between professional and amateur sports and make an honest effort to maintain it hope to compete on anything like even terms with such subsidized athletes? Such rhetoric screamed unfairness: it gave American readers a reason why the Soviet Union was doing so well in the Olympics, as well as reason to dismiss this success – it was achieved by cheating.

The 1956 Games had been a reality check for the USA. ‘Both in total number of gold medals and aggregate points under any system of tabulation, Russia displaced the United States as the unofficial champion,’ worried the New York Times. Soviet victories could be easily discounted for reasons other than amateurism. For instance, after the Melbourne Games Allison Danzig accused the Soviet Union of winning in sports that were less important. ‘Russia’s overwhelming supremacy in competitions that the United States ignores, and for which it enters teams that are little more than token representation, carried her to the top.’ Two of these token sports were identified as Greco-Roman wrestling and gymnastics: tellingly, the latter saw the Soviet Union come away with eleven medals, to America’s zero. Not only does this evidence gymnastics’ standing in American

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190 Allison Danzig, 'Russia Far Ahead of 68 Other Nations as Olympic Games End in Melbourne,' New York Times, 8 December 1956.
191 Ibid.
192 Danzig, 'Russia Far Ahead of 68 Other Nations as Olympic Games End in Melbourne.'
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
sporting culture, such reportage also served to minimize Soviet athletic victories by implying that the US was not really trying to win in such other, less important sports.

In addition to being portrayed as unimportant to the US, such sports were also perceived as unfair because so many medals could be won. Danzig was one such journalist who was keen to highlight this: ‘Avery Brundage was asked whether it was an equitable distribution of rewards for the effort expended to give three gold medals to one person for gymnastics when the decathlon goes through exhausting tests in ten sports from morning to night on two consecutive days and receives only one medal.’ 195

**Gymnastics’ Resulting Position in IOC Policy**

Such questions came to be major concerns in the IOC and FIG’s relationship, and this is where the first evidence emerges of the Cold War’s direct impact on gymnastics. IOC archives reveal that several moves were made in an attempt to downsize gymnastics at the Games, and although it was not the only sport targeted by this reductionist policy, this became a defining feature of the IOC and FIG’s relationship. In fact, before 1953, the gymnastics programme had only been expanding. Although the IOC had been looking to reduce its programme before 1953, no one had challenged gymnastics. 196

While suggestions of removing or downsizing gymnastics through its women’s events had always been couched in the discourse of combatting gigantism – the growing size of the Games – a 1950 vote shows the entire Programme

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195 Ibid.

196 ‘Minutes of the 49th I.O.C. Session: Mexico City, 17th - 21st April 1953,’ Minutes to Members of the IOC, 1953, in *IOC Archives- sessions and executive committee: CIO SESS-049ES-PV*, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre). This is the first example of gymnastics being suggested as a way to reduce the Games.
Commission was opposed to this idea, except the presidents of the London and Copenhagen Organizing Committees. Indeed, not only was it agreed that WAG would be added to the programme, it was decided that it would remain there as a ‘compulsory sport’.\textsuperscript{197} This brings credence to the idea that later suggestions were influenced by Soviet success in it, which should be borne in mind when reading the ‘problems’ Brundage identified in the sport.

In 1953, a commission was formed to assess ‘artificial team’ sports: gymnastics, equestrian and fencing.\textsuperscript{198} Removing women’s sports was also discussed but denied, with the stipulation that women only engage in sports ‘appropriate’\textsuperscript{199} and ‘in harmony with their constitutions’ – like WAG.\textsuperscript{200} While the Games certainly had logistical problems as they grew, the mission to reduce their size and the way they were conducted, was in some ways the beginning of a Cold War assault on gymnastics. Referring to his own experience as a competitor at the 1912 Games, Brundage himself claimed gymnastics had become unduly large:

\begin{quote}
If I am not mistaken, in the 1912 Games in which I participated, there were only gymnastic demonstrations, no competitions. In 1920 there were only
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{197} 'Minutes of the Copenhagen Session, 15, 16, 17 May 1950, Minutes to Members of the IOC, 1950, in IOC Archives - sessions and executive committee: CIO SESS-045ES-PV, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

\textsuperscript{198} Letter to Charles Thoeni (FIG Secretary General), 26 May 1953, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD3- Correspondence 1950-1955: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{200} Charles Thoeni (FIG Secretary General), Letter to Baron Eric von Frenckell, 2 November 1953, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD3- Correspondence 1950-1955: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
individual events (no teams) … As a matter of fact, in recent years, although [the FIG] permitted teams of 8 men, most countries have sent only 5 or 6.\textsuperscript{201}

However, Brundage was mistaken. Gymnastics had been a competition event (for men) since 1896, and the team competition had always been a major component. While the FIG agreed to reduce its team size from eight to six gymnasts and, in doing so, contribute to a solution towards reducing the number of athletes at the Games, the IOC’s satisfaction was short-lived. By 1958 the IOC again attempted to decrease team size, this time to four. The FIG sent several furious letters following this decision, which was made without its approval:

In reducing again our participants from 6 to 5 we would have a suppression of 40% of the number of our gymnasts, which is far beyond the goal we wish to attain, a sacrifice which you would never ask any other federation to accept.\textsuperscript{202}

However, Brundage responded with surprise – in his view, he had prevented the team gymnastics competitions from being cut altogether.\textsuperscript{203} Brundage noted that he

\textsuperscript{201} Avery Brundage (IOC President), Letter to Count Goblet D'Alveilla (FIG President), 4 June 1954, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD3- Correspondence 1950-1955: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre). Although this quotations speaks of men, these policies would affect both MAG and WAG. Masculine was the default gender when writing about athletes at this time.

\textsuperscript{202} Charles Thoeni (FIG President), Ginanni (FIG Vice President), Pierre Hentges (MTC President), and Berthe Villancher (WTC President), Letter to Avery Brundage (IOC President), 10 April 1958, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD4- Correspondence 1956-1959: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

\textsuperscript{203} Avery Brundage (IOC President), Letter to Charles Thoeni (FIG President), 28 June 1958, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD4- Correspondence 1956-1959: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
was only able to make such a compromise for gymnastics with the support of the Soviet IOC members. It would make sense that Soviet IOC members Alexei Romanov and Konstantin Andrianov would protect the size of a sport from which their country benefited in medals. By 1959, the FIG had managed to negotiate its position back to six team members, preventing cuts to gymnastics for the time being.  

Meanwhile, the IOC’s call to reduce the medals available in gymnastics caused ‘serious difficulties’. A new ruling that an athlete could only receive one medal per performance would have serious ramifications for a sport in which one competition yielded the potential of several medals per gymnast. It would be like a 400m runner having their race time eligible for the 100m, 200m and 400m medals. Performing a compulsory and voluntary routine on each apparatus, these scores counted towards a gymnast’s pursuit of a team medal, all-around medal, and medal for each of the four apparatus. Importantly, this policy would not contribute to reducing the size of the Games but rather redistribute medal potential – all important in the Cold War Games. This ruling would also affect several sports that did not yet have qualification rounds and finals, such as cycling, fencing and equestrian.

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204 Charles Thoeni (FIG President), Letter to Avery Brundage (IOC President), 10 June 1959, in *Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD4- Correspondence 1956-1959*: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

205 Charles Thoeni (FIG General Secretary), Letter to Avery Brundage (IOC President), 16 April 1956, in *Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD4- Correspondence 1956-1959*: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

206 Ibid.

207 Charles Thoeni (FIG General Secretary), Letter to Otto Mayer (IOC Chancellor), 20 June 1956, in *Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-...
However, it emerged that the Federation Equestre Internationale had absolved itself from this IOC demand. Due to Australia’s strict biosecurity policies, it was impossible to host the equestrian events at the Melbourne Games: instead they were hosted some months earlier in Stockholm. The change in medal policy was missed by the organizers, and subsequently, several medals could be won from one performance. The FIG successfully managed to argue that it would be unjust to then apply it to other sports.²⁰⁸

While these debates continued after the Melbourne Games, it was the Soviet IOC members who noted a solution that would become the first step toward the current qualifications/finals format of the gymnastics competitions. This retained the number of medals available in gymnastics, but solved the problem of too much reward for only one performance. In the first days of competition, gymnasts would compete for the team and all-around medals, based on their compulsory and voluntary routines. From this competition, athletes would be selected for the apparatus finals, which would then occur in a second, final round.²⁰⁹ In the decades to follow this would continue to evolve into separate team and All-Around competitions as well.

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²⁰⁸ Charles Thoeni (FIG President), Letter to Avery Brundage (IOC President) and Executive Committee Members of the IOC, 13 October 1956, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1906-1959, SD4- Correspondence 1956-1959: D-RM02-GYMNA/003, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

These examples illustrate certain trends in the correspondence between the FIG and IOC. Prior to 1950 this correspondence was mostly to do with accepting new member countries, fighting for power as the sole representative of a sport, and organizing the sport’s participation in the Olympic Games. After 1950, and the Soviet Union’s debut Olympics in Helsinki, nearly all of the correspondence is concerned with reducing the size of the Games. In the post-war period, the Games did indeed grow phenomenally. However, perhaps there is also an element of opposition to the encroachment of working class (athletes and officials, often from the Eastern bloc) into the gentleman’s organization, the IOC. Indeed, not only did the Baron Pierre de Coubertin found the Olympics based on aristocratic neo-classical ideals of sport at the turn of the century, he also stacked the committee (and those of the IFs) with aristocratic friends. The entrance of the working class en masse through the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc allies as well as women athletes (again mostly through the Eastern bloc but also due to changes in the IF’s construction of gymnastics) conflicted with the Olympics’ identity as an upper class, noble pursuit. Just as amateurism has been interpreted as an exclusionary measure against the lower classes defiling pure, noble sport, so too were the attempts to undermine and downsize those sports which most benefited such lower classes. Indeed, such an interpretation provides a fitting prologue to John Gleaves’ anti-doping research, which suggests that anti-doping was used to ‘reaffirm middle-class values and marginalize the accomplishments of working-class professional athletes.’ If the IOC devotion to amateurism could be seen as an exclusionary measure defining class

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210 Gleaves, 'Doped Professionals and Clean Amateurs: Amateurism’s Influence on the Modern Philosophy of Anti-Doping.'
participation in the Games, so too could its policy aimed at reducing (certain aspects of) the Games.

The Response to Brundage’s Renewed Crusade: Calls for Professionalization

In 1962 Brundage responded to widespread criticism of government-sponsored professionalism by banning ‘state amateurs subsidized by their governments and college athletes receiving scholarships based mainly on athletic ability’. The ban on ‘state-amateurs’ was predominantly aimed at Eastern bloc countries; that on college scholarships was directed at American athletes. Significantly, it was Brundage’s belief that the rule, if applied rigidly, would ‘disqualify about half of the American Olympic team’. As such, this policy was a direct reaction to condemnation of Olympic standards directed increasingly toward the USA as much as it was toward the Eastern bloc. ‘Eighty-five per cent of the criticism,’ said Brundage, ‘deals with “state amateurs” – boys taken away from their work and studies to train. The other criticism has been our paid and subsidized athletes. In international circles we [Americans] are considered worse than the Communists.’

Brundage’s efforts had little effect on professionalism in the Olympics, as American writers caught on to what Australians had been writing about since 1956: the bleakness of the amateur ideal at home. In 1967 Daley penned an objective description for the New York Times of the tenuous amateur situation for the ‘two nations that most dominate the Olympics’:

212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
Not by any stretch of the imagination can the Soviet Union be described as amateurs. The Soviet Union gives athletes sinecure jobs and other rewards as the athletes are subsided by the state. They are euphemistically called ‘state amateurs,’ but because they are capitalizing on their athletic skills they violate a cardinal rule in the Code. Hence they automatically become professionals – semi-pros, anyway. Can Americans sneer at the Soviet and feel superior? They had better not. We do that same thing but use a different system. The NCAA gives full blessing to the colleges, which award athletic scholarships. No matter how you shave it, this still is capitalization of athletic fame and therefore professionalism of the boys involved. In recent years, various international federations have looked askance at this practice with ever-increasing perturbation. The USSR and the USA have been in such a grey shadow land for so long that it is far better to look away and accept them for what they’re supposed to be rather than for what they actually are.\footnote{214}

As awareness grew of the shortcomings of both Eastern bloc and Western attempts at amateurism, the call for an alternative became louder from the American camp, particularly as it emerged that Brundage’s efforts to enforce the rule had amounted to little. Indeed, in 1968 Brundage again reminded the press of the limits of the IOC’s enforcement of amateurism: ‘We obtain three signatures to the Olympic oath, that of the competitor, the federation and the National Olympic Committee. If any of these three people have lied, what can we do? The Olympic Games operate on an honour system.’\footnote{215}

Amateurism came to be seen by the media as unrealistic, in terms both of enforcement and the demands of contemporary sports. Columnists such as Daley began voicing their concerns that the modern sporting world could no longer be held to the aristocratic English ideal from which amateurism arose. In 1967, he observed:


‘The toffs could afford to work at their play because they didn’t deign to work at work. But a changing world has eroded pure amateurism so completely that only the dilettantes are true amateurs.’\textsuperscript{216} Four years later, US Olympic swimming gold medallist, Don Schollander, and \textit{New York Times} writer Duke Savage added their support to the increasingly loud rhetoric for an official policy move away from amateurism. ‘[Amateurism] ignores radical changes in sport – both economic and competitive – and important changes in worldwide attitudes toward them. The fact is that amateurism is dead.’\textsuperscript{217} Concurrently with these shifting views, vilification of ‘professionals’ was displaced by the rise of anti-doping rhetoric.\textsuperscript{218}

By the 1970s, Olympic sport was becoming ever more popular thanks to increased leisure time, televised broadcasts of Olympic level competition and government awareness of the value of sport. With a greater number of athletes came tougher competition, and in order to be in medal contention most athletes trained four hours per day, six days per week.\textsuperscript{219} In an amateur system, not only were training and competing unpaid, but they came at a cost to athletes, through coach fees, club fees, travel expenses and broken time. With so many pressures on athletes, Schollander and Savage concluded that the amateurism rule, ostensibly in place to promote practising sport for sport’s sake, was obsolete. ‘In sports, no one can become the best only for money. An athlete, paid or not, can survive today’s pressure and competition only out of love for his sport.’\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{216} Daley, ‘The Impossible Dream.’
\textsuperscript{218} Gleaves, 'Doped Professionals and Clean Amateurs: Amateurism’s Influence on the Modern Philosophy of Anti-Doping.'
\textsuperscript{219} Schollander and Savage, 'Amateurism Is Dead.'
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
Yet an official departure from amateurism during Brundage’s long term as IOC President was seen by commentators as impossible, due to a wider conspiracy geared toward enabling Soviet sporting success. Indeed, despite this groundswell of support for professionalization, it would be another two decades before it finally came to fruition. Prominent columnists such as Daley complained that the Eastern bloc were responsible for preventing this change.

What makes change so difficult is that the Communist nations ally themselves with the idealists on every vote. It’s the same unholy alliance you find when the bootleggers and the clergy combine their votes to maintain prohibition in a dry town or country. The Commies ignore the rules and vote to restrict us.221

Although such commentary fed into the rhetoric of unfairness already demonstrated in American press, there was some merit to the idea that the Eastern bloc supported the amateur rule – after all, it thrived under the existing system while top Western players were excluded in sports that had professional leagues, like ice hockey or basketball. In gymnastics, however it did not prevent the best athletes from competing because of professional commitments; it did so due to practical responsibilities outside sport with relation to income and family.

After Brundage’s death in 1975, the American outcry against amateurism did not quieten. Rather, more voices added to the call for an end to the rule, building on the ideas outlined years earlier. ‘Anybody who has competed on a college grant-in-aid is as much a commercial professional as all those people in Montreal selling tickets and souvenir coins,’ announced another New York Times columnist Dave Anderson, highlighting the rule’s increasing irrelevance to contemporary society. ‘Some genuine amateurs exist in the Olympics but the world has outgrown the

Olympics amateur concept.' Pointedly, at this time moves were underway in Australia to create a state funded sports system based on the USSR’s model: the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS).

*Shifting Towards Professional Sport in Australia*

Many Australian journalists reflected the changed attitudes shaping their country’s new sporting policy. In some of the earliest steps towards development of the AIS, a new Ministry for Tourism and Recreation, created in the early 1970s, was tasked with improving Australia's sporting success. Such measures were some of the earliest steps towards developing the AIS. *Australians found themselves amateurs in a world of professionals,* remembered former athlete, coach, AIS founding board member, and sports historian John Daly, *‘possessing a sporting past but not a sporting future unless they were prepared to buy success’.* Despite shifting sympathies away from amateurism, several commentators still opposed the creation of the AIS for fear of hypocrisy over professionalizing. The Fraser government in Australia cautioned against achieving success through ‘communist’ means. While promising greater government assistance for athletes, Fraser ‘denounced the scramble for gold medals as a wrong-spirited approach to the Olympics, and asserted that athletes should not be regimented into military style win-at-all costs academies’.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Sport contended that the Australian people would find

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223 John Bloomfield, 'The Role, Scope and Development of Recreation in Australia,' (Canberra: Department of Tourism and Recreation), 1973. In 1973 John Bloomfield was commissioned to report on Australian sport, which recommended the establishment of the AIS, modelled on similar state-run programmes in Europe.

‘the all-encompassing Eastern European approach unacceptable’.225

One Man’s Work?

With comments such as ‘Avery was surrounded by other old men who think along the same lines as he does,’ New York Times reporters showed they were well aware that Brundage could not alone be responsible for upholding the amateurism rules.226 Indeed, while he was the Olympic Movement's leader from 1952 to 1972, those surrounding him comprised a powerful Executive Board of nine men, who voted on any major change to the rules, and a wider Congress in which every Olympic nation and Olympic sport were represented. Brundage is perhaps better seen as the face of amateurism, rather than a lone crusader for it. Certainly, the amateurism rule did not disappear overnight. Rather, Brundage’s passing was a symbolic relaxation of the amateur rules, as the figurehead of the ideal faded from public scrutiny. As another member of the old guard, his successor, Lord Michael Killanin, also had little effect on removing the amateurism rule. It would take another leader, Samaranch, to implement a series of changes (including power shifts within the IOC) before professionalization could slowly be allowed.

Conclusion

When amateurism was discussed in the Australian media, Brundage’s actions toward American athletes were as prominent as the Soviet question, suggesting that the Australian public took a more neutral view on the politics of Olympic sport. The common theme, though, was confusion surrounding the exact rules of amateurism

226 Daley, ‘What Price Amateurism?’
and its enforcement, which were often portrayed as a harsh, unfair policy for all countries. Most tellingly, after his death Brundage was not remembered in Australian newspapers for ‘letting the Soviets cheat,’ but rather as a ‘champion of amateurism,’ with little regard for nationalities and politics.\textsuperscript{227} Guttmann argued that Brundage’s actions could be attributed to his ‘public commitment to the universalistic ideal of Olympism [being] stronger than [his] private hostility toward communism.’\textsuperscript{228} Indeed this conclusion could be taken further, suggesting that his commitment to Olympism was stronger than his notion of political or national boundaries. Moreover, this assessment is perhaps not unique to Brundage, but many of those within the Olympic movement in the decades to come who refused to admit sport’s political nature.\textsuperscript{229} However, the amateur issue was not the only way Western newspapers sought to undermine Soviet victories, and not the only way Brundage’s leadership came into question. The expansion of Olympic sports available to women, as well as the Soviet Union’s reliance on female athletes also became a contentious Cold War Olympic issue.

\textsuperscript{227} 'Death of Avery Brundage,' \textit{Canberra Times}, 10 May 1975.


\textsuperscript{229} This assertion cannot be attributed to a particular source, but instead comes from perusal of several IOC collections. As a whole, they steadfastly refuse to mention politics, even in times where it might be expected, for example, following the 1972 terror attacks, or the boycotts of 1976, 80 and 84. Even reading between the lines, there are no political undertones, and IOC members correspond with sports representatives from warring countries (e.g. in WWII, or as Cold War enemies) as old friends.
Along with rhetoric accusing the Soviet Union of breaching amateur rules, the USSR’s abundant use of female athletes to support their cause – which gave advantage over Western teams who had all but ignored women’s sport – became another Cold War Olympic issue. Like the discourse surrounding amateurism, undermining female athletes became another way to challenge Soviet sporting power. This chapter examines how this rhetoric played out in the New York Times during Avery Brundage’s leadership of the Olympic movement, 1952 – 1972.

American policy toward female athletes, or lack thereof, was informed by nineteenth century notions of femininity. In particular, the way a woman’s primary role as mother was seen to be in conflict with physical exertion formed the basis of women’s exclusion from sport. As historian Patricia Vertinsky noted: ‘longstanding propositions about women’s capacity for sport and strenuous exercise developed in response to late nineteenth century physicians’ interpretations of biological theories about menstruation’. 230 Although by the twentieth century there were groups advocating women’s participation, in general American women’s sport lacked unified leadership, direction and organization in terms of a top-down, elite system. For instance, sports science, coaching and sports medicine paid little attention to female athletes, and there is little evidence of structured programs directed toward

elite sport for women.\textsuperscript{231} Another historian, Jennifer Hargreaves, found that until 1972, ‘there was enormous inequities between spending on male and female sport, sometimes on a scale of 50:1’.\textsuperscript{232} It was not until the Title IX amendments of 1972 – which demanded gender equity in sports programs run through the education system – that women’s sport was given greater recognition and representation in the US.\textsuperscript{233} However, even then, the effect of this on WAG remains questionable, as the sport draws nearly all of its Olympic athletes from outside the college system.

The issue of women’s participation in sport was particularly relevant in the Cold War context, as it was widely recognized that the standard of Soviet female athletes gave the nation a great advantage in the Olympic medal count. This Cold War concern was highlighted by a number of commentators. For instance, it appeared in an Australian newspaper in 1953, when Lawrie Jordan wrote: ‘Russia, renowned for the prowess of its women athletes, will be counting on them to clinch top place in the 1956 series. Americans are ready to admit that their women athletes are not as good as the Russians.’\textsuperscript{234} In Olympic medal tallies, Soviet success was largely due to a female contingent spread across a wider range of sports than most other countries and provided with more resources to ensure their success.\textsuperscript{235}


\textsuperscript{232} Hargreaves, \textit{Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sport}, 179.


\textsuperscript{234} Lawrie Jordan, 'Looking at Sport,' \textit{Mail}, 19 December 1953.

\textsuperscript{235} Riordan, 'The U.S.S.R..'
In addition, the Soviet Union also pressured the IOC to expand the programme of sports it offered to women.\textsuperscript{236} Welch and Costa called this period ‘the era of women’s participation for political purposes’.\textsuperscript{237} Campaigning for a greater number of sports for women was an ostensibly ideological move – marrying the communist ethos of equality between class and gender with opportunity in sport, and advertising it on a global scale. As Wood observed, gender was a powerful organizing principle for Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{238} However, promoting women in sport also held potential for the Soviet Union to gain the upper hand in medal counts, knowing Western nations were not preparing female athletes. For example, Riordan noted that by the 1976 Olympics Soviet women comprised 35 per cent of the Soviet team, while the American team consisted of only 26 per cent women, and the British only 20.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{239}

The common assumption concerning the media reportage on female athletes during the Cold War is that they were portrayed as ‘masculine, misshapen, sexually unattractive and, thus, a metaphor for the perversions of communism…’ ‘[Soviet women] were all dumpy and looked like tractor drivers…’ and ‘all women looked like men’.\textsuperscript{240} However, historian Stephen Wagg found that the predominant message surrounding women athletes in the British press did not concern their physique, instead focussing on their character as that of the ‘girl next door’ instead of serious


\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{239} Riordan, 'The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia and the U.S.S.R.,' 194.

\textsuperscript{240} Wagg, "'If You Want the Girl Next Door...' Olympic Sport and the Popular Press in Early Cold War Britain,' 101.
athlete – regardless of their nationality. The focus for female athletes was their life outside sport: their job, and their family. While this chapter concurs with these suggestions, consistently finding women framed in terms of their relationship to men, it also suggests that such discourse held deeper implications in determining Cold War sporting victories through discounting women athletes’ accomplishments.

Indeed, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Daley highlighted the strategic challenge posed by female athletes in the Cold War, criticizing the Soviet Union for opening the floodgates for women’s participation in sport.

When those Amazons from the Russian steppes came muscling into Helsinki last summer to sweep virtually every available event in sight, they left an indelible imprint on the Games. Removing the gals now would have all the overtones of a dastardly capitalistic plot.241

Herein was the problem: open efforts to have women removed from the Games would attract accusations that the US was trying to undermine the Soviet Union’s means of success. Moreover, it would expose the US to criticism over citizens’ equality, adding gender to the increasingly inflammatory race issue the Soviet Union peddled in anti-American propaganda of the time.242 It is in this context that more subtle approaches in reportage were used to discredit women’s victories, and reaffirm American sporting superiority.

Nonetheless, this problem saw Brundage as President of the IOC come under fire for enabling Soviet success. However, at the same time he was dealing with larger pressures of maintaining and enforcing the amateur rules of the Games, as well as dealing with the rapidly increasing size of the event. It was in response to this

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242 Rider, 'The Olympic Games and the Secret Cold War.'
latter problem that Brundage raised the possibility of removing women from the Games. Although, as Guttmann revealed, this was not an outcome Brundage advocated,\textsuperscript{243} it gave him a dual reputation. On the one hand, he was seen as allowing too many women into the Games, enabling Soviet success; on the other, he was regarded as an ‘anti-women’ leader.\textsuperscript{244} Although Brundage’s motives will not be teased out, his name serves as a useful symbol of his leadership in a distinctive era in women's Olympic sport.

While women’s exclusion from sport was by no means unique to the USA nor the two decades in question, the gendered understandings of sport at the time took on a unique Cold War significance. Unable to take a more official stance of opposition, and unwilling to reform America’s own system, the newspaper adopted several frames to undermine Soviet success and discredit women’s sport, perpetuating both social and aesthetic rationales for women’s exclusion from sport.\textsuperscript{245} This chapter identifies these frames and themes, and demonstrates how they were used to make women’s sport a Cold War issue. In considering the implications of these representations, it adds new insights to the study of both women’s sport and the Cold War.

To begin, I identify three main themes, or frames, in the commentary, dissecting them further to explore their significance in Cold War sport. While some of these sources have been identified by previous scholars,\textsuperscript{246} the use of the Cold War as an analytical framework gives new insights into the interconnectedness of such issues with gender and sport. I argue that these three frames ultimately served

\textsuperscript{243} Guttmann, \textit{The Games Must Go On}, 194.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{245} Kay, 'Sport and Gender,' 90.
\textsuperscript{246} Cahn, \textit{Coming on Strong}.
to create an alternative reality in which American sporting victory could be reclaimed

Sources and Themes

Initially the research for this chapter set out to find *New York Times* articles concerning women and sport in the twenty year period 1950-1970. Using digitized archives, search terms included various combinations and synonyms for ‘women,’ ‘sport,’ ‘Russian,’ ‘Soviet,’ ‘American,’ and ‘Olympic.’ The aim was to focus on articles concerning elite Olympic sport for women, rather than grassroots, participatory activities. The resulting articles of 100 words or more were then analysed for this chapter, revealing that most of those that met these criteria were much more commentary than simple reportage: editorials and opinion pieces, often by *New York Times*’ infamous columnist Arthur Daley.

As Guttmann has already noted, Daley promoted Victorian views about women’s sport.247 Potential concerns that the sample of articles could be seen as small and biased are allayed by the way Daley emerged prominently from a search methodology that avoided direct focus on his work. His writing was clearly in line with the *New York Times*’ editorial mission. For nearly fifty years he produced one of its most popular and enduring columns248 and was so highly regarded that he not only won a sports writer of the year award,249 but the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for

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248 Although Daley was not the sole contributor to ‘Sport of the Times,’ he was one of its main authors. Published seven days a week for over half a century, it was evidently a popular and powerful column for the newspaper.

journalism.\textsuperscript{250} In 1964 another paper called him ‘one of the top men in his field in the country,’ and asserted his “‘Sport of the Times’ column [was] read throughout the world’.\textsuperscript{251} Clearly, he and his views were extremely visible and influential.

**Minimizing And Dismissing Women Athletes’ Achievements**

The first and most common derogatory theme was minimizing, if not dismissing, women’s achievements in sport. Few were as vocal and spirited on this issue as Daley. In 1951, he expressed surprise that a female athlete, Carol Durand, could possibly be good enough, and allowed by the rules, to become a ‘full-fledged’ member of the US equestrian team for the upcoming Olympics. After briefly questioning if femininity was indeed the handicap he long thought it was, he concluded that females had been able to make the Olympic team not because they were excellent equestrians, but because of the horses:

> Perhaps horsemanship has no gender and femininity is no handicap... For almost a quarter of a century I have been watching the female of the species prove that it is not deadlier than the male - in sports anyway. Maybe the horse is the equalizer. *There is no other explanation.*\textsuperscript{252}

As well as minimizing women’s efforts, this theme went so far as to dismiss them altogether, by concluding that their achievements were less than the average male could achieve. ‘It’s probably boorish to say it, but any self-respecting schoolboy can


achieve superior performances to a woman champion,’ wrote Daley in another article, an argument that appeared in more than one of his columns. Belittling female athletes to this extent allowed people to dismiss their work and accomplishments because they did not conform to masculine precedents and expectation about sport.

**The Athleticism/Femininity Dichotomy**

A second theme set femininity – and the necessity for women to conform to its criteria – at the opposite end of a scale that defined masculinity through sport. It was a dichotomy that minimized, detracted from and diverted attention away from women’s achievement. Instead, the focus was on how males relate to females, on their attractiveness and on their purported indifference to competition, strength, or exertion.

And how would you like to see your son marry a lady marathon runner? …There were two dreamboats in the high jump. One was a blonde from Sweden, Ingabritt Lorentzon, and the other a blonde from Poland, Jaroslavia Jozwiakowska. They would have been much better off in a Miss Universe contest. It just doesn't seem right to watch a female leap clumsily over the bars, throw the weights awkwardly or scamper over a track in unladylike fashion. They lose all their daintiness and appeal. Besides, the Paris couturiers add to the women's attractiveness much better than do the designers of track suits, even skimpy ones.

In other words, women’s roles were to be pretty for men to look at. Their entirely superficial value rested on the potential of their decorative capacity to make them attractive wives: sport, talent, and skill were irrelevant. Dismissive of female

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253 Ibid., and Daley, 'More Deadly Than the Male.'

athletes’ very presence in the Games, Daley mourned: ‘Women first were admitted as spectators and then as competitors. Now they clutter up the joint and feminine frills have begun to debase this temple of masculinity’.255

The Integrity of Using Female Athletes to Win the Games

Couched in nostalgia toward the gender segregated Greek Olympics, another theme disparaged the very existence of female athletes as a flouting of the sacred rules of the Olympic Games: as pawns of a greater Cold War plot to ensure Soviet athletic victories, with no regard for women’s wellbeing, their undesirable presence was almost a form of cheating.

What's happened to the ancient Greek ideals? The worst of it is that the Russians keep clamoring with ever growing intensity to add more and more women’s events to the Olympic program. The women's 800-meter run has now been jammed into the schedule and probably is a fixture. Yet it seems disgraceful to have women race a half-mile. If the Soviet has its way, this international show will wind up completely as a coed production.256

Promoting the idea of removing women from the Games became a means of securing traditional gender roles as well as reclaiming athletic victory. Roles that would have women shy away not only from physical exertion and strength, but even competition, demanded that a woman’s only form of exercise should be designed to enhance her reproductive capabilities.257

255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
In pursuing the ancient Greek analogy, Daley affected concern that 20th century women athletes might be unaware of the deadly consequences suffered by their classical foremothers in breaking the sacred rule of the original Olympics:

It might be a shock to those in women's lib to learn that dames were once summarily barred from the Olympic Games in ancient days - even as spectators. If any culprit was discovered, she was led forcefully from the arena and flung to her death off a huge rock in the vicinity. A couple of thousand years ago few dared break Olympic rules.258

Yet Daley destroyed his own argument about female fragility in disparaging comments on the achievements of women responsible for the lion’s share of American success at the 1972 Winter Olympic Games. If his intention was to shift the focus from their victories by telling them they were lucky to be there at all, he had chosen an argument emphasising their resilience: ‘The message is there for all to accept: take a gal out of the kitchen; give her a chance to freeze to death in a wintry setting and she performs wonders.’

Discussion:

Securing the Status Quo

These themes served to maintain the status quo of women’s athletics in the United States. Instead of rising to the challenge posed by successful female athletes abroad, the response in the US was to berate those efforts as unworthy. As American female athletes’ accomplishments were dismissed, attention diverted away from them, or their integrity and safety questioned, the implication was that women’s sport held little value. Instead of investing in and promoting women’s sport in the US, the

gendered sports system continued unchecked and was unable to rival the support given to foreign female athletes.

By the end of the period in question, increasingly disgruntled American athletes became vocal about the uneven support given to male and female athletes. During the final Games of the Brundage era, the *New York Times* published the following concerns of American female athletes, who asserted that ‘discrimination against women athletes was not the exception but the rule’:

‘A lot of the girls have gone to the German doctors,’ said a hurdler, Patty Jean Johnson. ‘The American staff takes this indulgent attitude toward you and they tend to think you are imagining things when you come to them with feminine complaints.’ The women also say they are getting half of whatever the men get, whether it's equipment or passes for their friends and families to enter the Olympic Village. ‘When we are issued anything, we always seem to come up a few short,’ said a 1,500-meter runner, Doris Brown. ‘The men seem to get as much of anything as they want.’

Such grievances reinforce the arguments that these negative themes contributed to stagnation rather than development in US women’s athletics, with the denigration of female athletics allowing the US to ignore ingredients of their sports system that continued to discourage women’s participation. It was a failure recalled by Daniel Ferris, an official from the AAU, in a recollection making a pointed comparison with Australia's potential to use women's support as a Cold War asset: ‘I remember asking an Australian official how they got their girls interested in track. He replied the girls were treated just like the boys – when there was a track meet both took part. We [in the USA] have only about six meets a year for girls.’

In 1953 Daley used patronizing condescension to take his rigid view of gender roles and their relevance to sport to new depths: ‘Women are wonderful, but when those delightful creatures begin to toss the discus or put the shot – well, it does something to a guy. And it ain’t love, Buster.’ ²⁶¹ He diminished female athletes' efforts by focusing on superficial aspects of their bodies and how they impacted upon men: ‘There’s just nothing feminine or enchanting about a girl with beads of perspiration on her alabaster brow, the result of grotesque contortions in events totally unsuited to female architecture.’ ²⁶²

A number of similar articles show that Daley was far from alone in using contemporary male conventions about feminine roles to minimize women's sporting aspirations. Indeed one writer, identifying disturbing new trends, was on the verge of suggesting the very foundations of society might collapse:

Right now, at the 1960 Summer Games in Rome, hundreds of women are competing and tens of thousands of women are watching… It is difficult to determine whether the change signals a decline in civilization or a rise in womanhood - or both. ²⁶³

The same commentator observed:

Among the more discriminating and distressed, it is not the girls' watching that is worrisome; it is their competing. It is felt that by plunging into certain sports women tend to destroy The Image - that subtle power by which they exercise the tyranny of the weak over the strong. Now we find that [our women athletes’] enthusiasm runs to presenting America's claims as having the best-

²⁶¹ Daley, 'More Deadly Than the Male.'
²⁶² Ibid.
muscled girls in the world. Next thing you know, we'll be bragging about having the best looking automobile wrecks in the world.^[264]

Muscularity was likened with being a ‘wreck’, athleticism in women clearly not something to celebrate. ‘Compare the ten-best looking women athletes in the Olympics with the ten best looking of all kinds and you will see that the race is not always so to the swift,’ wrote William Furlong.^[265] To drive home the message that sport made females less attractive and that their looks were the real competition, Furlong added interviews with female athletes that probed their ability to fulfil their penultimate gender role of finding a husband.^[266]

**Redirecting Attention Away From Women Athletes**

One outcome of these frames was that they redirected attention away from women athletes. After they won seven of eight American Olympic medals at the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo, Japan, Daley warned how their success might be used to the advantage of the feminist movement.

Advised is hereby given to the women’s libbers, though, to exult in female winners while they are fresh in mind because a sports-minded public normally pays mightily little attention to the distaff athletes. *They are cinch to go relatively unnoticed in the real Olympic Games at Munich in August because the men are the superior performers in every sport.*^[267]

Instead of lauding women athletes as the saviour of the American effort in Sapporo,

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^[264] Ibid.
^[265] Ibid.
^[266] The athletes interviewed were all positive about sport enhancing their attractiveness and popularity with men, however Furlong justified this by suggesting this was because they came from sport that ‘enhance the Image’.
Daley’s insistence that men are better athletes, despite recent evidence to the contrary, was hammered home by his unambiguous positioning of women athletes in his conclusion: ‘The gals were a distracting factor in the Winter Olympics, but in the main Olympic show this summer the men will get top billing.’\textsuperscript{268}

\textit{An Alternative Narrative of a Victorious West}

Ultimately, Daley was developing a narrative in which the US emerged both as victors in sport and preservers of a natural, domestic order. It undermined Soviet success in the Olympics as largely earned by its female contingent. A final comment in 1952 exemplifies Daley's view of an America triumphant in the cultural Cold War, through the athletic prowess of its men, and the proper femininity and domesticity of its women: ‘The Soviets did achieve a close victory \textit{but} only with the help of its women athletes. \textit{The Amazons} won four of every ten events but their men took only two of twenty-four.’\textsuperscript{269}

Calling the women \textit{Amazons} was meant to invoke unflattering imagery of lumbering, unfeminine females. In short, the athleticism/feminine dichotomy, which justified lacklustre women’s sport in the West, shifted the emphasis on athletic accomplishments, privileging instead aesthetic traits in women, and devaluing their sporting achievement. America was victorious because women's sports did not count and American women were more womanly.

\textbf{The Cold War in WAG}

While the cultural chasm between Eastern and Western approaches to women’s sport

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{269} Daley, 'The Olympic Enigma.' (Italics added). This is not the only instance where Soviet female athletes are disparaged as ‘Amazons’.
was enormous, it did not fully define gymnastics, which is often seen as a women’s sport, largely due to the popularity of its female participants in the decades to follow. Indeed, the FIG was keen to promote it as such, with constant references to WAG’s feminine demands in correspondence with the IOC, as well as internal policy documents. However, gymnastics is not only WAG. Despite the FIG's advocacy, it was, like many others in this period, regarded as men's sport by default. Burdened by the general assumption that women's sport was of little consequence, it was not seen as particularly feminine or special.

It was in the following decade that the FIG's and IOC's promotion of WAG as a women's sport led to a popularity that overcame the negative rhetoric. It was not simply a women’s version of a man’s sport, it was appropriate for women and came to be thought of as a feminine sport more than a masculine one. WAG’s very design was meant to showcase how beautiful, graceful, and feminine women could be. Numerous qualities were associated with the sport and its ‘feminine’ connotations, including weakness, passivity, responsiveness, beauty, aesthetics,


271 Letter to Charles Thoeni (FIG Secretary General), 26 May 1953.

272 Plaza et al., 'Sport = Male… but Not All Sports: Investigating the Gender Stereotypes of Sport Activities at the Explicit and Implicit Levels.'
dependence, nurturance, fragility, grace, expressiveness and flexibility.\textsuperscript{273} Physical attributes that would have delighted Daley defined good execution in gymnastics: fluid, ease of movement in which nothing should appear difficult. The positive emphasis on the female physique, combined with the different apparatus and requirements of MAG, enabled WAG to be accepted without seriously challenging the still prevailing concepts of gender difference.

In this way, WAG occupied a uniquely contradictory position for women’s sport. Its femininity allowed it to grow, gain acceptance, and avoid many of the common criticisms preventing participation, let alone investment in sport in the decades to follow. In this sense, it can be seen as a gateway sport forging the path of acceptance of women, sport, and athleticism. On the other hand, at the end of the Brundage era, something designed to be uniquely feminine was unlikely to challenge the gendered assumptions of traditional sporting competition. As the years ahead brought gymnastics further into the realms of athleticism and masculine sport, the older views did not entirely disappear.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In summary, both the reactions to amateur athletes and female athletes tell a similar

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story. The Soviet Union entered the Olympic games and competed in many women’s events – easily swelling its medal count against inferior competition. It then lobbied for further women’s events partially for ideological reasons, but also as a tactical way to increase its medal count, knowing full well the competition paid little attention to women’s sport. Much like the reaction to amateurism, the Western reaction toward female athletes was to reaffirm existing beliefs about women, while seeking to undermine the Soviet effort, which could be seen as an ideological defence. However, this soon gave way to greater support for women athletes in much the same way there came a growing call to professionalize the Games. No country could win without the efforts of its female component, and ideologically it undermined efforts to expound the virtues of a free and equal society. Accordingly, the second stage of these reactions was an offensive in funding for elite sport for women in the USA and Australia from the 1970s onwards. It is in this context that WAG, designed and promoted as uniquely feminine, occupied a uniquely gendered space in sport during the Cold War.
Part II: 1970 – 1979

In the 1970s, Cold War tensions thawed somewhat into a period that became known as détente. But it is precisely this détente that saw sport, as a form of soft power, become a notable feature of Cold War politics. This development had several implications for gymnastics, which in turn was undergoing its own fundamental changes. A new style of WAG was introduced in this decade, propagated and popularized by a new kind of gymnast – small, young and dynamic. In contrast with the ballerinas who had previously dominated the sport, now pre-pubescent girls performing acrobatic feats became the most successful gymnasts. But this transformation was not straightforward. Soviet athlete Olga Korbut was the most famous exponent of this new style and, although she was not the first to perform this type of gymnastics, her popularity, both within gymnastics and among the general public, prompted serious attention to questions of artistry, risk and acrobatics. It was a problematic development for the rule-makers of WAG, the WTC, who denigrated this style of gymnastics, before realizing they had indeed facilitated it, and they might in fact need it for the sport to survive in the Olympic movement. Four years later, Nadia Comaneci achieved her perfect 10s using this same style and the trend was cemented, along with gymnastics’ popularity.

In the wake of this success, both Korbut and Comaneci toured the US and Australia, and their governments seized on this opportunity to promote Eastern bloc values in the West. WAG’s use in Cold War politics reflected a similar trend in Sino-US relations: ‘Ping-Pong diplomacy’. As a marker of détente, the gymnasts’ visits also served as precursors to higher-level political meetings. Important to the gymnasts’ public popularity and consequent diplomatic roles, however, were specific media constructions that framed the gymnasts as acceptable visitors: demure, non-
threatening and Westernized guests. At the same time, these tours were embedded in the economic context of the Olympic Games of the time. A symptom of the murky transition from pure amateurism to professionalism, the tours also focused attention on Soviet thwarting of the amateur rules.

While previous studies have examined gymnasts’ routines and relied on interviews to explore the acrobatization of WAG and the impact of Korbut and Comaneci, chapter three draws attention to other actors: primarily, the FIG which in turn was influenced by figures within the organization as well as the IOC. Thus, building on the existing scholarship that has established *how* WAG developed in the 1970s, the aim here is to begin to give a broader picture of *why* it developed in such a manner. Chapter four explores the meaning of this development and the Cold War values ascribed to gymnasts and gymnastics as a result. It aims to demonstrate the use of gymnastics in 1970s Cold War cultural diplomacy, illustrating how specific media representations and political meetings were a factor in the détente of this decade, yet evolved within the Olympic context of amateurism.
Chapter Three

Dynamic and Young: Daredevils and the Changing Nature of WAG

Déteinte was a period of relative harmony in which Cold War tensions shifted from military displays of power to cultural, and particularly sporting, competition. This turn in Cold War politics was a stark departure from the abrasive relations that had preceded the decade earlier, including the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the Prague Spring of 1968 and the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine later that same year. After Richard Nixon won the 1968 presidential election on an unachievable promise to end the Vietnam War on favourable terms for the United States, he moved away from a policy of containment and looked toward creating more peaceful relations.

Meanwhile the election of the Whitlam government in 1972 abruptly ended Australian involvement in Vietnam. Western critics had long recognized that the Sino-Soviet split made nonsense of the notion of monolithic international communism. Now, a visit by Whitlam, roundly criticized but soon followed up secretly by American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and then openly by President Nixon, showed that China was emerging from the internal upheavals of the Cultural Revolution to be a serious factor in international politics.274

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As the Soviets and China competed against each other as well as the West to exploit fragile post-colonial states in Africa, South Africa became a source of internal conflict within the United States, Australia and New Zealand. While critics of apartheid favoured economic sanctions and sporting boycotts, conservative governments saw the racist regime as a bulwark against communism. Along with all these new factors the Middle East continued to defy simplistic Cold War divisions. The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, promising to help any country in the region resist Soviet influence, had never sat easily with the even more difficult dilemma of supporting the integrity of Israel while wanting the oil of its implacable opponents, Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular. The decade began with murderous Palestinian terrorism against Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics and ended with the Iranian revolution against the regime of the Shah long propped up by the United States, which then endured a traumatic hostage crisis at its Tehran embassy.

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Under Brundage’s stubborn leadership, the IOC attempted to ignore sport’s relationship with politics. However, eventually political shifts began to show through to the sporting arena, with the popular nature of the Olympic Games making it a high profile site for protest. Controversial demonstrations at the 1968 Mexico City Games – the Mexican students’ revolution, the Black Power salute of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, and Vera Caslavska’s silent protest against Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia – had demonstrated the value of the Olympics in publicizing political issues. Protest groups continued to impact the Games, with the 1972 Munich Massacre followed by the 1976 African boycott. After 1972, Avery Brundage, the stalwart of amateurism, finally resigned from the Olympic presidency, signalling the beginning of a shift towards professionalizing the Games under his successor Irishman Lord Michael Morris Killanin. WAG, as one of the Olympics’ most popular sports, was deeply influenced by these issues even in the four years between Olympics.

This chapter will explore these differences, beginning first with a reappraisal of the assumptions around gymnasts’ ages and sizes. As the changing demographic of athletes shifted, so too did the type of gymnastics they performed. Next, the FIG’s role and responses to these changes is explored. But because the FIG operated within the Olympic framework, it is necessary to step back and examine how this relationship impacted 1970s WAG. Finally, this leads to an examination of the judging of WAG, revealing one of the most important ways the Cold War influenced the sport.

In the mainstream media, and even amongst gymnastics fans, there is a general assumption that Korbut and Comaneci re-defined women’s gymnastics as a juvenile sport. Journalist Dvora Meyers sees Korbut as starting the ‘little girl’ trend. ‘Korbut’s debut marked the beginning of the end for the older balletic women who had dominated women’s gymnastics during the early years and paved the way for young, energetic women like herself.’ But research suggests her argument is overstated: younger and increasingly acrobatic performers appeared in international gymnastics in the years before the Munich Games. Korbut and Comaneci were promoters not innovators of the trend towards youth: the former introducing it to the Olympics, the latter reinforcing its success.

In her thesis on the evolution of WAG, Roslyn Kerr traced the youthful trend back to 15 year old Larissa Petrick’s victory at the Soviet National Championships in 1964, and 16 year old Natalia Kuchinskaya’s gold at the 1966 World Championships. Further to Kerr’s work, FIG bulletins also suggest the trend was already underway before Korbut or Comaneci appeared on the scene. In 1971, a year before Korbut’s famous appearance in Munich, the FIG issued a warning to the countries using younger gymnasts to perform greater acrobatics:

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280 Hardy Fink, 2014. This is Fink’s descriptor of the new style of gymnast that developed in the 1970s.


282 Kerr, 'The Impact of Nadia Comaneci on the Sport of Women’s Artistic Gymnastics,' 92-93.

283 Kerr, 'The Evolution of Women's Artistic Gymnastics since 1952,' 49.
Medical reports have given a warning and pointed out the dangers of abusive training without the necessary control … gymnasts, even those in the Olympic class, are not merely circus phenomena for whom the cheap thrill of the performance accomplished tasks with frequently disastrous physiological consequences… Nobody should be so irresponsible as to think only of producing ‘competitive animals,’ hastily trained, frequently damaged and incapable of continued progress after a certain level has been reached … how much surer it is to obtain high-class gymnastic champions whose fullness is manifested in their psychic and physiological ‘flowering.’

Not only did the trend towards youth and acrobatization emerge before Korbut and Comaneci, data from the preceding Olympics demonstrate that the decline in age was equally prominent in the West. For example, the USA had long used teenage gymnasts. While the US and the USSR debuted their Olympic gymnasts in 1952 with an average age at almost 28, the American age quickly declined to under 20 from the 1956 Olympic onwards. Meanwhile, the USSR also saw a decrease in age, although much slower, remaining in the mid-20s until the end of the 1960s. The average (mean) age for gymnasts from the USA was 18.3 in 1960, decreasing to 17.5 by 1976. By comparison, gymnasts from the world’s most dominant gymnastics nation, the USSR, averaged 24.5 years of age in 1960, dropping only to 19.5 in 1976. The USSR’s greater average age during the 1970s points to the USA being ahead of its time in using younger gymnasts. Through this period several US gymnasts were aged 15 in the Olympic year, and by 1980, two 13 year olds and two 14 year olds had been selected for the Olympic team. In contrast, between 1960 and


285 Sports Reference, 'Sr/Olympics,' http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/. Ages found by accessing country information for gymnastics at each summer Olympics. This data can be verified with that supplied by Olympic.org
1976 the Soviet Union had only one gymnast younger than 15, and this was not until 1976 when Maria Filatova competed in Montreal.

These data show that the trend toward younger gymnasts originated in the West, not with the world leaders of WAG. The ages of Eastern bloc gymnasts decreased only when the style of WAG changed as a result of MAG coaches beginning to work with women. Barker-Ruchti argues that such coaches favoured the pre-pubescent bodies of younger women, as they resembled the boys with whom they were accustomed to working.\textsuperscript{286}

There is no doubt, however, that Eastern bloc innovations in the 1970s did accelerate the trend towards youth in the West. Older women with families, jobs, and little time were unable to meet the increasing training demands of elite gymnastics. This difficulty was exacerbated later in the 1970s, particularly once Comaneci’s coaches, Bela and Marta Károlyi, advocated training over five hours per day in the latter half of the decade, which many others would follow.\textsuperscript{287} Eastern bloc countries could meet such demands through the system of ‘state amateurs’ or student athletes financially supported to concentrate on training. As a result, age and gendered domestic responsibilities bore less influence on a gymnast’s ability to train. Such centralized support was largely unavailable in most Western nations before the 1980s, while private sponsorship would disqualify women for professionalism. The answer for Western nations was to work with athletes already supported outside the gym, with no other work or familial responsibilities: children.

\textsuperscript{286} Barker-Ruchti, ‘Ballerinas and Pixies.’
\textsuperscript{287} Kerr, ‘The Impact of Nadia Comaneci on the Sport of Women’s Artistic Gymnastics,’ 89.
Interviewed in 2014, Canadian Hardy Fink, Director of the FIG Academy Program, former chair of the Men’s Technical Committee (MTC), and the most experienced judge in any gymnastics discipline\(^\text{288}\) remarked on this trend:

> What does professional mean? All your needs are taken care of, you maybe get a salary, maybe not. But you’re completely taken care of for everything … So there are your girls. Most of the gymnasts are young teenage girls… Their parents pay for their room, their housing, their school, they drive them back and forth to the gym, they pay for their fees.\(^\text{289}\)

Unhappy with the decreasing age, the FIG drew up a rule, insisting gymnasts reach a minimum age to be eligible for competition. Indeed, a large majority of its WTC had voted in favour of such a limit in 1971: any gymnast wishing to compete at the 1972 Games must be at least 14 years of age in 1971.\(^\text{290}\) With this stipulation, the FIG commented:

> Let us hope that we shall see less of these children… incapable of mature and harmonious work, being physically and intellectually forced to a degree of self-discipline necessary not only to achieve an impeccable technique but also to demonstrate feminine charm.\(^\text{291}\)

It is notable that the WTC’s concern was not for athlete welfare, but the inability of young, prepubescent girls to express true femininity. The effect of such measures, however, is questionable. FIG Bulletins highlight continuing concern over gymnasts’ age and reveal inadequate enforcement of the rule. In 1973, while the rule was to

\(^{288}\) Fink has held a Brevet judging qualification in MAG since 1969.

\(^{289}\) Hardy Fink, 2014.


apply to all FIG sanctioned events, it was left to national federations to assume responsibility for ensuring gymnasts were in fact 14 years of age.292 A WTC meeting in September 1975 highlighted the problem once more: ‘The chairman points out the gymnasts taking part in the Montreal Test were too young (14 years old). Consequently, the demonstration of exercises suffered’.293 When Romanian success at the 1976 Olympics emphasized the skill of such youthful athletes, the WTC remained committed to excluding young gymnasts. ‘The age of the gymnasts participating in the competitions is getting younger and younger (12-13 years); although their exercises are astonishing, it is most important that this matter should be examined after the Olympic Games.’294

Finally, in 1978 a sports physiologist, Krustyo Krustev, completed a research report for the FIG about the trend towards youth, as the FIG attempted to legitimize its exclusion of gymnasts on the basis of age. However, as Krustev would point out, most Olympic sports saw a decrease in average age between the first modern Olympics in 1896 and the 1976 Games, largely due to a decline in participants aged over thirty.295 In gymnastics, however, the trend was more visible because it was the medallists who were in a younger age bracket. Due to ‘female physiology,’ Krustev

argued that the trend toward youth was to be expected in a sport designed for women.

In girls (unlike boys) the relative strength ceases to increase after the age of fourteen or fifteen, and after nineteen it may slightly diminish. The elasticity of [female’s] joints begins to diminish after the age of fifteen. Bearing in mind the practice of gymnastics from a very early school age, we can easily understand how a talented gymnast has all the physiological and biomechanical capacities to reach peak form at the age of fourteen to sixteen… And so, top performances at around fifteen are normal for women and are a result of the typical development of their physique.296

Krustev recommended the WTC cease deliberation over a minimum age limit. He advocated allowing young athletes to participate in international competition for the performance value and audience approval they earned: it was good publicity for gymnastics.

There is no physiological or medical reason why we should deprive the Olympics from such brilliant performers as Nadya Komaneci [sic], Cornelia Ender, and quite a few others. From the age of thirteen or fourteen they aroused universal admiration and at Montreal they were the symbolic emblem of the youthful vigour of the Games. This is play and not war, after all!297

It would seem that the FIG heeded Krustev’s advice to relax their concerns, as this trend continued well into the 1980s and 1990s until IOC pressure prompted change. Krustev’s report also points to a deeper issue at the heart of age concerns in WAG: young, immature gymnasts were considered less feminine than their older counterparts, and thus less artistic. Moreover, the acrobatic performances promoted by this leaner body type also did not adhere to pre 1970s notions of artistry, which

296 Ibid., 56-58.
297 Ibid., 59.
the FIG had imagined, in its 1968 Code of Points, as ‘harmonious flexibility and feminine grace’. Thus, the relationship between decreasing age and acrobatization was central to the FIG’s concerns. Disapproval of younger gymnasts went hand in hand with the resistance to masculine traits inherent in acrobatization: risky, dynamic movements, adopted from MAG which threatened to displace WAG’s older balletic ideals. The FIG’s resistance to younger gymnasts, therefore, can be interpreted as resistance to acrobatization, which was in turn a failure to adjust to new (masculine) notions of artistry.

Nonetheless, as the perception of WAG as a child’s sport grew, both within and outside the sport, the FIG faced increasing pressure to deal with the problem. Eventually, by 1981, the IOC began to pressure the FIG to improve their regulations around age, even though the FIG was at least a decade ahead of the IOC with regard to such rules:

In spite of that you already have an age limit in your sport, in light of the experiences of the near past, the IOC insists that you reconsider your present

\[298\] Barker-Ruchti, 'Ballerinas and Pixies,' 47. Barker-Ruchti explores such performances and bodies through the likes of the sexually mature, Czechoslovakian gymnast Vera Caslavská, who was over 20 year of age when she won her Olympic titles, in comparison to later, sexually immature and younger gymnasts such as Korbut.

\[299\] MAG has similarly artistic goals to WAG. However, they too were constructed upon gendered ideals: particularly strength and control on apparatus designed to demonstrate such traits (such as still rings, pommel horse, ad parallel bars). Vault, high bar, and floor came to appear very similar to WAG’s vault, uneven bars and floor in the context of acrobatization, although the remnants of the divergent goals can be seen most explicitly in the women’s music, choreography and dance requirements on the floor exercise. Both disciplines had goals of demonstrating different, gendered qualities, however both were considered artistic.
age limit for both men and women, carefully studied by your medical commission (if any) and by your other appropriate bodies).³⁰⁰

By the late 1980s, correspondence with the IOC reveals that the FIG had settled on a minimum age of 15 for Olympic Games and World Championships.³⁰¹

**FIG Responses to Acrobatization**

Despite its hostility, the FIG’s bulletins show it was unable to mount a consistent resistance towards acrobatization. It was not pleased when gymnasts performed increasingly acrobatic routines at the expense of feminine qualities the sport previously upheld. Korbut, with her pre-pubescent body and circus style performances, was the embodiment of the move away from this style and her gymnastics were the cause of much debate in the FIG. Yet paradoxically updates to the Code of Points and improvements to the apparatus, both approved by the FIG, pushed the sport in an acrobatic direction.

The 1970s remain a nostalgic era for fans recalling a blend of acrobatic skill with superb ballet and choreography: the ideal of *artistic* gymnastics. Even current WTC President and former Soviet Olympic gold medallist (1976 and 1980), Nellie Kim regrets the passing of a period of Soviet-led artistry: ‘Soviet schooling was


³⁰¹ However, at the World Championships in the year before the Olympic Games, a gymnast could be 14, in anticipation of her qualifying to compete at 15 at the upcoming Games. Max Bangerter (FIG Secretary General), 'Age Limit of Gymnasts,' Letter to Bernard Schneider (Sports Department of the IOC), 9 June 1987, in *International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1985-1988, SD3 1987-1988*: D-RM02-GYMPNA/008, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
always well known for the beauty of floor routines. The whole world learned from us how to create a routine, how to combine music and sport. Unfortunately, this doesn’t exist anymore.\textsuperscript{302}

But archival records demonstrate that such nostalgia is perhaps misplaced. In the 1970s the FIG was already concerned about the lack of musicality, rhythm and artistic grace it wished to define the sport: traits it called femininity. For instance, this criticism from 1971 would not be amiss in the commentary surrounding WAG in 2016:

For every good and intelligent composition there were so many dreary background dronings … so many catch-tunes tagged together, waltzes which allow the gymnast to arrive at the end more or less in time with the music, not to mention all the massacred classical music.\textsuperscript{303}

Within the bulletins, such criticisms signify the beginning of a shift in understandings of artistry, as the FIG began to grapple with increased emphasis on acrobatics (appropriated from MAG and performed by sexually immature bodies) at the expense of the traditional movements (exhibiting ‘feminine grace’).

The 1970 WTC President’s Report on WAG for the FIG’s EC showed how new codifications were encouraging increased acrobatic performance with no emphasis on dance skills. Only acrobatic elements would be compulsory ‘because


they can be based on a reasonably rigid technique’. Meanwhile, up to 1.5 points were reserved for the ‘diversity and originality of the liaison sections’ of the routine (choreography and non-compulsory skills). Yet, while FIG’s goal of promoting and rewarding beautiful choreography and innovation was thus confirmed, allowing gymnasts and coaches so much freedom to meet the loose guidelines of the Code ultimately facilitated acrobatization. Arguably this freedom surrounding codifications of artistry also contributed to the stylistic interpretations of gymnastics that emerged at this point (for example, watching videos of the medal winning floor routines from this decade would reveal a classical dance-based style from the Soviet Union, compared with a playful contemporary style from Romania). This freedom from requirements facilitated what is now considered WAG’s golden age of artistry, which contemporary codifications have failed to revitalize. However, codification itself was a result of later pressures to objectify the sport.

In terms of the acrobatization of the 1970s, much of the FIG’s disapproval was directed at developments on beam. However, these developments followed a 1970 ruling making only acrobatic skills compulsory. After the 1972 Olympics the WTC observed ‘too many acrobatics’ on beam: ‘the technicians should finally come

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305 For example, after 2012 a rule was introduced to stop gymnasts simply standing in the corner of the floor to catch their breath before a tumbling pass. However, the new deductions simply resulted in most gymnasts standing on one leg in the corner, which was not the artistic outcome the FIG was looking for. For contemporary commentary, see Dvora Meyers, 'Corner Flamingos,' Unorthodox Gymnastics, 20 March 2013, http://www.unorthodoxgymnastics.com/2013/03/corner-flamingos.html.
to understand that acrobatics should be reserved for the floor exercise’. Such critics clung to the ideal of routines based on ‘balance positions, turns, [and] rhythmic steps’. The problem was not simply in the tumbling on the beam, but also the ‘jerky’ routines with ‘frequent pauses’ it caused. 

**Technological Developments**

Technological innovations endorsed by the FIG also encouraged acrobatics. When the WTC approved modifications to equipment, the elements possible on the apparatus changed. In 1971 the bars were to be set between 54 and 78cm (depending on the gymnasts’ preference), the regulation springboards were to be covered in carpet, the beam upholstered rather than bare wood, and the floor ‘double sprung’. As a result, gymnasts began to perform release moves on the bars, somersault on the beam, and tumble to greater heights on the floor. On the vault, in 1974 the springboard was raised to 15cm, and the vaulting horse to 120cm to allow greater propulsion and height in the air. Thus in 1976 women such as Nellie Kim introduced the full twisting Tsukahara (double somersaulting) vault, previously only performed by men.

On the beam, the FIG worked to introduced padding – ostensibly for safety reasons – but such equipment advances only served to encourage greater height and

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307 Ibid.
force to be used on the beam: in other words, acrobatization. In 1973 the WTC began experimenting with a felt cover over the sharp edged, wooden beam, to provide some padding for the new skills performed on it.\footnote{Nagy, ‘Minutes of the Meetings of the W.T.C. Held at Stuttgart from 21st-30st January, 1973,’ in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 77, no. 2, (June 1973): 43.} After its debut at the London European Championships, the covered beam was further modified by a regulation it must be covered in artificial leather from 1975 onwards.\footnote{Nagy, ‘Minutes of the Meetings Held from 15th-29th October, 1974 at Varna,’ in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 86, (March 1975): 70.} Indeed, by such means it would appear that the WTC supported and encouraged risk and spectacle in the development of gymnastics. Gymnasts were already required to include two to six elements of ‘superior difficulty,’ although these did not need to be acrobatic in nature. Yet, at their October 1973 meeting the WTC discussed requiring gymnasts to perform three to six specifically ‘acrobatic difficulties’.\footnote{Nagy, ‘Minutes of the Meetings of the W.T.C. Held at Stuttgart from 21st-30st January, 1973,’ in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 77, no. 2, (June 1973): 45. Emphasis added.} Although no requirement was finalized, such discussions point to a contradiction between the FIG’s stance on acrobatization and the policies that encouraged exactly that. This further supports the notion that it was not acrobatic skills that the FIG resisted, but rather the loss of what had previously been considered ‘feminine grace’.

\textit{Acrobatization and Masculinity}

In 1975, in response to the extent of acrobatization nurtured by the FIG’s technological and Code of Points regulations, the question of risk versus artistry was brought before the FIG General Assembly:

\begin{quote}
We should perhaps now ask ourselves if the moment has not now arrived when we should mitigate the trend towards ‘risk’ and ‘difficulty’ which are rapidly
\end{quote}
becoming more important than deportment and execution. We should take care that artistic gymnastics do not degenerate into pure acrobatics with risk to life and limb.\textsuperscript{314}

Such concerns suggest that FIG’s resistance to acrobatization was probably more about new interpretations of artistry than safety: in particular, artistry in terms of femininity. WAG was created as a niche sport in which women could compete without ‘masculine’ qualities (strength, power, risk) compromising their feminine qualities – beauty, grace, and ease of movement – or endangering their reproductive capabilities.\textsuperscript{315} Rather than acrobatization itself, it was the associated masculine qualities, so far removed from the original purpose of WAG and its interpretation of artistry, that drew much resistance from the FIG.

\textit{Anti-Korbut Sentiment}

A second aspect of the FIG’s conflicting policies on acrobatization was its resistance specifically to Korbut’s gymnastics. The most notable of her major innovations presented at the 1972 Olympics were the backward salto on the beam, the Korbut


\textsuperscript{315} For example of how this worked against women in other sports, see: Jaime Schultz, 'Going the Distance: The Road to the 1984 Olympic Women's Marathon,' \textit{The International Journal of the History of Sport}, 32, no. 1 (2015); and Lynne Emery, 'An Examination of the 1928 Olympic 800 Meter Race for Women,' (paper presented at the \textit{Proceedings of the North American Society for Sport}, 1982). After the 1928 Olympics, the women’s 800m race was banned for the next 32 years, owing to depictions of female athletes ‘fainting’ at the finish line, endangering their health. Rather than being an accurate reflection of the events (no one fainted; one woman lay down to rest after she had completed the race), it was more a reflection of the contemporary rhetoric surrounding women and physical activity spilling over from the 19th century and pervading most women’s sport throughout the 20th century.
flip, the Korbut loop on the bars, and the presentation of overarched positions, both as a hold on beam and as a slow backward somersault to her chest at the end of her floor routine.

Shortly after Korbut presented these skills in Munich, they prompted much discussion amongst the WTC, particularly, the backward somersault on beam. In addition to its masculine qualities suggested above, the problem with the element was equally in the risk of tumbling on top of the beam as it was in the necessary pauses that such tricks required. Indeed, the WTC did not see acrobatization as a form of development at all, and in its report on the gymnastics at Munich, made this quite clear:

With regard to the exercises at beam, they remained static in spite of tremendous efforts and they risk becoming even more so if the floor exercises continue to be exploited on this apparatus. This necessitates the systematic use of chopped off bits of exercises which impair the general composition and run the risk of causing serious accidents…

Accordingly, the WTC attempted to ban the backward somersault on beam, ‘in view of the fact that this element is not peculiar to the beam… In this way, it is hoped to avoid danger’. Incensed, Korbut threatened to retire from international competition: ‘If the decision is put into effect then I simply do not see any place for myself in gymnastics’. Given the attention she had brought to the sport, or perhaps due to quiet negotiations, the FIG reluctantly allowed for the skill’s continued use.

Yet a year later the WTC ‘put forward proposals’ concerning the backward somersault on beam. Adriena Gotta of Italy and Ellen Berger of GDR suggested that the backward salto ‘should not be considered as a specific beam exercise,’ recommending that it be put to the ‘medical commission,’ so they might have further justification for its prohibition. Oddly enough, this is the exact wording of the 1974 reports: however, in no following bulletins are there reports of the medical commission, nor mention of its existence. Later on, FIG-IOC correspondence reveals that the FIG medical commission was formed in 1982, suggesting perhaps there was an unofficial group which preceded it. Nonetheless, it can be deduced that in the same way the WTC looked to the physiologist Krustev to legitimize their concerns over age, the WTC turned to scientific discourse to justify the ban on acrobatic changes they desired. In the meantime, the WTC continued to promote the idea that the salto be discouraged as ‘neither specific to nor characteristic of the beam’.

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Similarly, the WTC looked to the ‘medical commission’ to justify an elimination of ‘movements with too pronounced or over exaggerated back bends’.

Korbut’s bar dismount was questioned too, with the WTC deciding a dismount without grip (by standing on the bar to perform a back salto) was not in keeping with regulations and would be subject to deductions. In addition, pausing the swinging motions to stand atop the bar and perform the Korbut flip was also declared illegal and subject to penalties, although the element was not actively outlawed until a decade later. Subsequent development of the sport showed that the WTC’s attempts to pass responsibility for removing Korbut’s definitive innovations to the medical commission had, for the most part, failed.

**Relations Between the FIG and the IOC**

The FIG’s responses to acrobatization were more complex than its own conflicting policies, resistance to change and masculinity, and to Korbut herself. Equally important was the difficulty of satisfying the contradictory demands of the gymnasts and the IOC, the effective controller of international sport.

In perusing the correspondence between the FIG and IOC housed at the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, one of the first conclusions to be drawn is how much the desire for power affected this relationship. The IOC sought to be the top

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322 Nagy, 'Extract of the Minutes from Meetings Held at London,' in *FIG Bulletin*, vol. 82, (March 1974): 40. With regard to the over-exaggerated back bends: ‘The WTC agreed upon doing everything possible to eliminate these movements and submitted the problem to the FIG medical commission.’


down administrator of all sports under its umbrella; the FIG sought to assert its independence and its value to the IOC.

The IOC was at times belittling to the FIG, constantly threatening the legitimacy of gymnastics as a sport, and thus its inclusion in the Games. ‘If one man can win eight medals in an international set of Games, the events must be altogether too simple,’ accused Avery Brundage to the FIG President in 1971. ‘And it certainly detracts from the importance of the sport.’\(^\text{325}\) In turn, the FIG constantly sought reassurance of its status in the Olympic movement, but framed this confidently and assertively. In 1961, after waiting all day to be seen by members of the IOC Executive Committee in Rome, FIG President Charles Thoeni wrote to Brundage: ‘Sitting in the waiting room hardly pleases me. Gymnastics is not a minor sport.’\(^\text{326}\)

In response, Brundage cooed agreement.

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\text{I personally place gymnastics in the first category of sports. It is true that it is assigned a minor role here in the United States, but I consider this a national misfortune. Gymnastics is basic and fundamental in any national sport program.}\(^\text{327}\)
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One of the most common themes of this derision was the number of medals available


in gymnastics. Another concern was the idea of ‘artificial teams’. Again this trope questioned the validity of gymnastics as a team sport, and thus threatened to reduce the gymnastics competitions at the Games.

Tired of being constantly under threat, the FIG at one point hinted at the possibility of leaving the Olympic family, although this seems to have been a bluff.

Surely it is not unknown to you that for a number of years now the gymnastics sport found itself perpetually compelled to struggle in order to maintain the place at the bosom of Olympism to which it deems itself entitled. To what do we owe these restrictive tendencies toward our sport? In certain gymnastics circles the question is already being raised whether there is still any point in our participating in the Olympic Games, and whether it would not be much wiser to replace them by World Championships every two years. However, we of the head of the FIG have grown firmly attached to the Olympic ideal and we refused to consider this alternative. 328

The FIG sought recognition, respect, and the right to rule itself more than anything else. Moreover, it asserted that the very Federations which the IOC attempts to control are those who in fact enable the very persistence of the Games through their kind cooperation. For example FIG President Arthur Gander wrote to the President of the IOC Programme Commission in 1973:

The IOC takes the final and definite decision for the framing and programming of the Olympic Games, but you certainly know that these Games can only be organised to carry out their aims if the recognised federations have at least an

328 Charles Thoeni (FIG President), Pierre Hentjes (MTC President), and Berthe Villancher (WTC President), Letter to Avery Brundage (IOC President), 20 January 1961, in Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG): Correspondence 1960-1976, SD1-1960-1961: D-RM02-GYMNA/004, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre). Emphasis added.
indirect influence on the programme in general and on the programme of their sport in particular.\textsuperscript{329}

Indeed, this was a mutually reliant relationship: The Games could not go on without the support of its member federations representing each sport contest at the Olympics; yet it was a marker of prestige and status to be included in the Olympic movement and its lofty ideals.

The FIG’s foremost goal was to maintain gymnastics’ place in the Olympics. Although WAG came into question through its subjective scoring, it was most threatened by the sheer size gymnastics occupied in the Olympics as the IOC faced growing financial pressures. FIG Bulletins from the 1970s suggest the IOC saw the team competition as the main target for cuts because ‘both men and women [gymnasts] represent a large contingent within the framework of the national delegation’.\textsuperscript{330} As the FIG added more disciplines to its repertoire in the 1970s it wanted them added to the Olympics. After Munich, it applied to have Rhythmic Gymnastics included. The IOC both rejected this request – due to ‘the necessity of combatting giantism’ – and countered it by suggesting a reduction in the number of gymnasts per team in the artistic disciplines.\textsuperscript{331} Rather than receiving approval for Rhythmic Gymnastics at Montreal, the FIG had to defend the MAG and WAG


programmes already included. The IOC then submitted a formal proposal to limit to twelve the number of teams in the WAG competition. For their part, the FIG was willing to comply with this demand, however moved to protect the complementary efforts of individual gymnasts who also competed in the team final, as this competition served as the qualification round for the individual and apparatus competitions. Nonetheless, the FIG moved reluctantly, and was sure to make clear to the IOC the sacrifice it was making:

…Approval was preceded by substantial opposition from some federations who were against any limitations or reductions… However, it was achieved [at the FIG Congress] with a large majority, thus showing the goodwill and understanding in view of the IOC’s good intentions and mutual collaboration between the IOC, IFs [International Federations], and NOCs [National Olympic Committees] in the interests of the future Olympic Games.

It agreed to concede the number of teams in the competition, on the condition that space be made for four additional groups of six individuals each, enabling 24 individual gymnasts from nations without a team to participate in the qualification round. But the IOC was not done with its downsizing of gymnastics. Following concerns over the limited distribution of medals – that is, few gymnasts, mostly from the Eastern bloc, won most of the medals – the IOC demanded the FIG ‘limit the number of entries per country, and final competition with 2 gymnasts (men or

332 Ibid.


334 Ibid.
Thus the FIG, supported by its Soviet contingent, introduced a new rule to reduce the number of competitors per country to two for the apparatus finals. However, it refused the IOC’s suggestion of two per country in the individual All-Around as well, and instead suggested it could bear reducing the number to three – they were successful in this bid. This innovation enabled a new array of countries to become medal contenders, although the Eastern bloc still maintained their domination of the top positions.

Such compromises enabled the FIG to stave off the IOC’s constant demand to reduce the number of gymnasts within each team from six to five. It appears this was the FIG’s strategy in dealing with its Olympic overlord, as FIG President Gander wrote to the IOC in 1973: ‘we would like to point out that with a reduction in

\[335\] Arthur Gander (FIG President), 'Gymnastics Programme at the Next Olympic Games,' Letter to Authorities of the FIG and Affiliated Federations, 23 October 1973, in International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1960-1976, SD4 1971-1974: D-RM02-GYMNA/004, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre); and Arthur Gander (FIG President), 'Adaptation of the Programme for Artistic Gymnastics at Future Olympic Games,' Letter to Dr. Arpad Csanadi (President of the IOC Programme Commission), 4 May 1973.

\[336\] Hardy Fink, 2014. Fink emphasised that Soviet support was necessary and forthcoming in this change.

\[337\] Arthur Gander (FIG President), 'Gymnastics Programme at the Next Olympic Games,' Letter to Authorities of the FIG and Affiliated Federations, 23 October 1973. Minot Simons attributed this FIG change to Soviet gymnasts at the 1974 World Championships claiming the top five placings in the All-Around and floor finals, while winning the top four positions on beam. While this particular event exemplified the lack of diversity in WAG medal distribution, Simons underestimated the IOC’s influence on the FIG, which is demonstrated by archival correspondence. Simons, Women's Gymnastics: A History, 201.

\[338\] Arthur Gander (FIG President), 'Adaptation of the Programme for Artistic Gymnastics at Future Olympic Games,' Letter to Dr. Arpad Csanadi (President of the IOC Programme Commission), 4 May 1973.
the number… of teams… as well as a limitation on the possibility of one gymnast winning too many medals, our sport has made the absolute maximum of sacrifices in the Olympics Games according to its characteristics’. 339

Indeed, only a few years later, the FIG used this obliging position to graciously suggest the programme could perhaps be expanded, in light of its popularity following Munich and Montreal. 340 They requested 16 national teams compete at the Olympic Games, as well as three individual gymnasts from the next 10 nations ranked 17-27, and one gymnast from all remaining federations. The FIG’s new leader, Soviet Yuri Titov, had prepared these numbers after working with the organizing committee for the 1980 Games in his hometown of Moscow. 341 Not only is this an excellent example of the positioning between FIG and IOC, it also demonstrates the assertion from the oral histories, that Titov was a leader who truly tried to open the sport up to encourage greater participation from a wider range of countries. However, the IOC decided not to include these proposed changes, and gave no reason for its decision. 342

341 Yuri Titov (FIG President), 'Gymnastics Programme,' Letter to Henry Banks (IOC Technical Director), 25 March 1977.
While such co-operation appears to have been effective in maintaining gymnastics’ place in the Olympics, issues with judging and doping put its inclusion in jeopardy.

**Judging**

The subjectivity of WAG scoring had at times also led to questioning of its status as an Olympic sport. It came under new scrutiny in the wake of Eastern bloc score fixing scandals in diving and figure skating. While no major gymnastic scandals erupted in the public eye, the judging system in gymnastics was anything but fair. Comment from Western coaches and judges now reveals systematic manipulation of scores throughout the Eastern bloc. Facing IOC pressure, the FIG made efforts to rectify judging problems, although as demonstrated at the 1976 World Championships, these initiatives had little impact.

A 1974 FIG report highlighted the issue of subjectivity and the inherent difficulty in creating rules to eliminate score fixing. The nature of the 10.0 system required rating gymnasts based on comparative impressions:

> We rely on the more or less subjective assessment of experienced judges who more or less consciously compare the performances with some stereotyped perfect performance that is presumably accepted and known by all concerned.

The entire scoring system of WAG was based on an assumption that all judges envisioned the same ideal performance. While the FIG’s efforts to remediate this

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were demonstrated in improved versions of the Code which began to detail what this ideal should be, such reports also indicate a continuing problem that judges’ understandings of the ideal were not always uniform. Complicating this issue was that gymnasts were, at least in part, judged by a reputation that preceded them. ‘The socio-psychological literature is replete with studies showing that a judge’s beliefs about the personal characteristics of a gymnast (race, personality, attitude, etc.) will affect his rating,’ said the same FIG report. ‘A judge’s expectations of the gymnast … will also potentially affect the rating.’

Yet oral histories suggest there was indeed conscious cheating alongside these underlying biases. When the Eastern bloc remained strong politically, so did its alliances in the judging of gymnastics. Agreements to exchange higher scores with sympathetic partners were made in order to share the medal podium. As Fink put it, many international judges in the 1970s ‘did what they did for the Eastern bloc, and they shared among themselves’.

In her autobiography Korbut recalled such an incident at the 1974 World Championships in Varna, where the scores did not reflect that she had been the best performer on the uneven bars. When she approached delegation leader, Yuri Titov, to file a protest, he remained unmoved. ‘Each of the winners had been selected before we even set foot on the podium,’ claimed Korbut. While Korbut’s credibility could be questioned, given this allegation appeared in her autobiography and served to present herself in a better light, her claims echo Fink’s concerns over score-fixing in MAG. According to Korbut, the Soviet Union had arranged for the bars medal to be given to an East German, in exchange for Soviet star Ludmilla

\[345\] Ibid.

\[346\] Hardy Fink, 2014.

\[347\] Korbut and Emerson-White, My Story, 122.
Tourischeva’s assured floor victory. ‘The adults who ran the sport treated us like pawns on a chessboard, deciding who would win or lose for their own selfish reasons,’ she alleged. The East German judge was reprimanded after this event, but was allowed to judge again within the next two years. Meanwhile, no Soviet was punished, and indeed Titov went on to become President of the FIG two years later.348

Károlyi too alleged cheating in the later part of the decade, implicating Ellen Berger several times throughout his autobiography. Reflecting on the 1977 European championships he charged: ‘Ellen Berger, once the East German gymnastics coach and now part of the judging committee, was pulling strings for the East Germans’.349 While like Korbut’s, these words should be read with caution given their appearance in Karolyi’s autobiography and his reputation for crafting his public image, they nonetheless add to the growing body of claims regarding score fixing. ‘The Russians were using dirty tricks to win the gold on the vault. Nothing unusual,’350 claimed Károlyi, referring to an incident at the same competition, which is discussed below.

Citing another example at the 1980 Olympics, Károlyi suspected that the judges had delayed Comaneci’s final performance on beam until rival Elena Davydova of the Soviet Union had completed her bar routine: ‘until they had figured out what score should be given to make Davydova the winner’.351 When Károlyi complained to Titov, the FIG leader appeared upset and worked to amend the situation, in keeping with sentiments from oral histories about Titov’s integrity as President. When his

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349 Karolyi and Richardson, Feel No Fear, 68.
350 Ibid.
351 Ibid., 94.
efforts failed to move Comaneci into first place, Károlyi was infuriated with Titov: ‘This is a disgusting cheating game, and you were the orchestrator’. But Karolyi’s accusations were coloured by his anger: indeed, after ascending to the FIG presidency, Titov made a number of changes to improve judging.

Nonetheless, score fixing was rife throughout the ranks of FIG leadership. Fink explained in more detail just how corrupt the system was during the 1970s. As Chairman of the Canadian MTC in the 1970s, he was nominated Technical Director of the gymnastics competitions in both disciplines at the Montreal Olympics and thus invited into the select group of FIG officials, ‘the old boys club’.

…They arranged the scores and they arranged the results. We ran the test event in Montreal in 75, and because I was Technical Director in charge there we had a meeting about doing the draw for the test event. And the Technical President actually says to me: ‘Do you want to do a proper draw or do you want to make it interesting?’ I was so idealistic! … They arranged scores.

As the Soviet Union dominated WAG for so long, it was an advantage for other countries to co-operate. Outside the team competition, more nations were involved in the medal tally and medals were distributed through an on-going negotiation: for example, if it was agreed to give a Soviet gymnast the top score on beam, then an East German could take the gold on vault. It was worthwhile for some smaller nations to cooperate with their large neighbour: reciprocally, the Soviet Union looked after its bloc. ‘They made all their little Soviet countries happy,’ said Fink.

352 Ibid., 95.
353 Hardy Fink, 2014. Although Fink’s main experience is in MAG, his role at the time of this incident covered both MAG and WAG for the Montreal Olympic Games. It is unclear if he is speaking specifically about one discipline or referring to both.
354 Ibid.
355 Ibid.
It was difficult for countries outside the Eastern bloc to break into these circles. Speaking from Montreal in 1976, USGF founder and executive director 1963-1980 Frank Bare observed: ‘Who the hell are we going to make a deal with? There are two judges from the U.S., two from Canada and you know where the other 48 are from.’ Although Bare spoke of the men’s competition, the situation was likely similar in WAG, although further oral histories would be needed to explore this claim. Korbut believed Western judges were difficult to bribe but also indicated ‘it was important that there be a Socialist victory over capitalism,’ so it was likely Western representatives were seldom approached. Perhaps such issues prompted Bare’s election to the FIG vice presidency that year.

The Soviet Union may have been responsible for manipulating scores, but many other groups were often sympathetic to Eastern Europe. IOC archives reveal the sport was plagued with purposeful bias in judging since at least 1948. An American who competed in MAG at the London Games observed:

The judging was very bad in this meet, not because the judges did not know gymnastics or the rules at that time, but because they were cheating. We took films of many exercises and then filmed the scores, unbelievable! It was disgusting to watch…

Despite the Soviet Union’s astute manipulation of scores, they were only able to do

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357 Korbut and Emerson-White, My Story, 122.
so because such conditions already existed in the sport – not through its inherent nature but due to the way it was run by those in power. Indeed, throughout the 1970s the WTC was led first by the Frenchwoman Madame Berthe Villancher, subsequently by Hungarian Valerie Nagy, before East Germany took over leadership in 1976 under Ellen Berger. It is important to note that through much of this time, the President of the FIG was not a Soviet, but a Swiss man, Arthur Gander. The same source as above accused Gander himself of being involved in this score fixing, saving the best scores for last: ‘I approached Arthur Gander who was a judge [in 1948] and asked why [I only received] a 9.00 – his answer was that the good teams had not performed yet! Mr Gander was later to head FIG and I always hoped that I had misunderstood him’.359 Only after Montreal did Titov, a Soviet, become President, and oral histories consider Titov to have been a fair and effective leader for the sport. To what extent these individuals and their loyalties played a part in women’s judging throughout the 1970s will probably remain unknown: what is clear is that gymnastics had a tradition of operating under these assumptions, and under this leadership judges were unchecked and unaccountable.

The Start Order, Comaneci, and the 1976 Olympics

In 1973, the WTC suggested that ‘the best teams should work during the afternoon,’ (while earlier sessions of the competition would feature weaker teams).360 Making such a change to the highly influential ‘start order;’ the order of succession in which gymnasts perform, would serve to enhance the difference in scores between the top and lesser performers. Indeed, this became a strategy for gymnastics teams because

359 Ibid.
it is believed that judges ‘save’ higher scores for later performances. If they give
high scores early then see better performances later in the competition, they are
unable to make ample differentiation between the better performers. Cumiskey’s
above concerns over Gander’s leadership dealt with his conscious employment of
this bias to give the best scores to the later teams (who had not received their spot
late in the day by chance, as Fink asserted). ‘You must judge according to the first
routine,’ explained British judge, Ursel Baer in 1976. ‘There may be slight
imperfections but you may have to go to a 10 (perfect score) because it’s better than
anything that’s been before.’ Indeed, the 10.0 provided a ceiling in the sport that
stopped differentiation between performers who skilfully performed the
requirements, and those who mastered them, and went above and beyond to do more.
It was a conscious manipulation of this concept that skewed the competition at the
Montreal Olympics.

Many sports fans are familiar with Comaneci’s historic feat in 1976, the first
perfect 10.0 in Olympic competition. Gymnastics fans watching her routines may
ask how she received a perfect score, not once but seven times. They see a 0.1
deduction for a hop on landing, a slightly bent leg here, or a lack of amplitude there.
Of course her routines were superb, but they were not perfect. But perfect, it seems,
is relative. Oral histories demonstrate the scores of that competition had been
artificially inflated to lessen the margin between Comaneci and her nearest rivals.

Blatant score fixing was not possible: Comaneci was clearly the best gymnast
present, and it would have raised serious questions if this superiority were not
reflected in her scores. But it could be arranged to keep her scores within 0.1 of her

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1976.
competitors, making sure she had no margin for error. ‘I wouldn’t say her 10s were orchestrated so much as all the 9.9s below her were,’ observed Fink. The slightest fault would put the Soviet gymnasts back in gold medal contention. ‘She was so far ahead, and there was no way they were going to beat her. And even with a fall she had a margin. So they took the margin away... All the top gymnasts were getting 9.9. Ok Nadia was getting 10s, but if she ever fell, she was out.’

American Frank Bare alleged that Valerie Nagy of the WTC ‘tried to change the judges in the floor exercise illegally… to hurt Romanian star Nadia Comaneci’s chances in that event’. Nagy attempted to replace the Western judges on the floor exercise with ‘pro-Russia’ East German and Russian judges, until a protest from Bare blocked the move. Such incidents point to the idea that it was a select group of judges, extending to the highest positions of power in the FIG, who were responsible for manipulating the scores of this monumental competition.

Most judges were probably not involved in this plan, but few had reason to question the scores. Lowly ranked nations were happy to be suddenly scoring higher than ever. Many judges also unknowingly contributed to the inflated scores, due to peer pressure. If one judge’s marks were significantly different from the others, it might reflect poorly on their judging as they were under pressure to keep within range. Fink suggested: ‘the judges cheerfully go along because they don’t even realize what’s happening. If everyone gives 9.9 are you going to give 9.1?’

An elite group of judges, therefore, with positions of power within the FIG technical committees, were largely responsible for the score-fixing results of 1970s gymnastics. Their practices trickled down to affect how many judges behaved. ’We

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362 Hardy Fink, 2014.
363 Associated Press, 'U.S. Gymnastics Officials Level Charges.'
364 Hardy Fink, 2014.
would call it corruption,’ explained Fink. ‘They would call it the way of doing business.’ Fink remembered an incident when a MAG judge from a high profile country simply did not understand the concept of cheating: he saw it as ‘working for [his] country’. Many of the judges working for the FIG, particularly those in high positions or on committees, were in salaried positions working for their governments, including President Titov. Certainly, Olympic archive correspondence shows telegrams to him were addressed to his Moscow address, at the Soviet Sport Committee. As Fink asserted, Titov was working for his government as much as he was working for the interests of international gymnastics. Indeed, after ten years work at the FIG, Titov’s leadership was approved of at home, with his appointment to Secretary General of the Soviet NOC. This points to his particularly skilful leadership: without alienating the country for which he worked, he was able to take steps towards reforming the sport’s judging.

Despite the continued score-fixing agreements, the Eastern bloc countries ‘were willing to make sure that the rest of the world wasn’t screwed and they really helped grow the sport abroad,’ said Fink. For instance, when the IOC pressured the FIG about the distribution of medals and the monopolies of certain countries, the

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365 Ibid.
366 Ibid.
367 Ibid.
368 Arpad Csanadi (Honorary IOC Sports Director), 'Ref: 150,' Telegram to Yuri Titov (FIG President), 13 January 1982, in International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1982-1983, SD1 1982: D-RM02-GYMNA/006, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
370 Hardy Fink, 2014.
FIG responded with a rule allowing only two gymnasts per country into the finals. The Soviet Union actually supported implementation of this proposal, which had enormous effects on the growth of the sport worldwide.\textsuperscript{371}

Another initiative to increase opportunities within the sport came about shortly after Titov became FIG President in 1976. A suggestion of drawing lots for judges had been raised previously in the FIG, but the WTC had voted against it, up to and including the 1976 Games. Selecting judging panels rather than leaving it to chance facilitated score-fixing agreements, hence Bare’s outrage over the switching of floor judges at the 1976 Olympics. In addition, as Fink’s testimony suggested, when lots were drawn for the gymnasts’ order, it was a negotiation behind closed doors, rather than an actual draw. Titov’s initiatives brought greater transparency: at the 1977 European Championships the draw was done ‘in the presence of FIG officials and journalists, and broadcast on television,’\textsuperscript{372} with the ‘aim of achieving still more objectivity,’\textsuperscript{373} making it increasingly difficult to fix results. Titov also introduced video referencing at these Championships to further promote accountability and transparency at the FIG: ‘the judges should therefore be aware their work can be checked up on’.\textsuperscript{374}

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{373} Titov, 'Report of the President of the F.I.G.,' in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 95, (December 1977): 42.
Romanian Walk Out

Despite such efforts, at the same European Championships of 1977 allegations of biased judging led the Romanian team to storm out mid-competition. At the time, the European Championships was one of the most important competitions on the gymnastics calendar, featuring all of the strongest nations in WAG. This competition was also the first major event in the wake of Comaneci’s victory in Montreal that had been used as testimony to the success of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu’s regime. With a new interest in gymnastics, Romania had arranged for televised coverage at home. Ceausescu demanded success for Romania but the rest of the Eastern bloc was reluctant to agree. As the FIG described the incident: ‘The Rumanian Delegation left the competition before the end and this we could not understand. This behaviour is regrettable and the incident has been discussed at the end at the meeting of the EC who sent a note to the press.’ The reasons behind Romania’s impromptu boycott, and the FIG’s alleged part in it, were notably absent from this report.

Other sources claimed that during the first event of apparatus finals, scores were changed to enable a Soviet victory. It was suspected that Comaneci had the highest mark on vault, with Soviet Nellie Kim coming second; the Soviet Union then protested Kim’s score in light of her having performed a vault of greater difficulty. The protest was accepted and Kim’s score upgraded so that the two gymnasts tied. Yet when the medal ceremony began (after the first rotation), Kim was given the gold and Comaneci was called up to take second place. While Comaneci went on to perform on the bars and then the beam, Ceausescu became so indignant over the

score adjustment that he ordered the Romanian team to leave the arena immediately. 377 ‘The entire country of Romania had been watching the championships, and the people were infuriated by the unfairness of the judges,’ Comaneci recalled in her autobiography. ‘For the first time in our country’s history, the event had been on television, and when they’d seen Bela [behaving as usual] carrying on and shaking his fists against the judges they demanded that the Romanian team be saved from injustice.’ 378 Despite continuing the competition to score two 10.0s, during the time between vault and beam, a Romanian ambassador had been sent to the competition to collect the team. The political statement was meant to be heard loud and clear: unfair, biased judging would not be tolerated by Romania. The Soviets in particular, received special vitriol, with the American ambassador to Romania reporting that the incident did little to serve Soviet-Romanian friendship: ‘No one will convince the Romanian public that it has not once again been discriminated against by its Russian neighbour.’ 379 Moreover, the American ambassador accused Titov of doing little to ease tensions by accusing the Romanians of walking out because they could not accept that Comaneci was simply not the best. 380 While there is no conclusive evidence to give credence to these allegations, the incident nonetheless had an effect on judge accountability.

378 Comaneci, Letters to a Young Gymnast, 62.
380 Ibid.
Following these events in 1977 Romania proposed to the FIG a new rule that, to ensure accountability, each judge must display the score they awarded.\textsuperscript{381} However, this would not be employed for another nine years. Until then, audiences were only notified of the judging panel’s mean score. In light of Fink’s comments about conspiracy, this proposal seems to suggest that Romania was not in the select group of allied judges. The United States’ proposals also point to their exclusion and disadvantage in the judging system: in 1975 they had proposed judges for finals be from ‘neutral’ countries only, those ‘not having any gymnasts in the final competition in that event’.\textsuperscript{382} It is difficult to know with certainty how proposals that would have disadvantaged compatriots of some in the technical committees were received. As no further discussion of these ideas appear in the FIG’s records and no changes were made to the Olympic format, it can be assumed that these proposals were rejected or ignored.

**Conclusion**

WAG in the 1970s underwent rapid change from its previous style, resulting in a greater number of acrobatics performed by younger gymnasts. Archival research demonstrates that this acrobatization was facilitated, if not encouraged by the FIG through improvements in equipment as well as the emplacement of new rules requiring that greater numbers of difficult elements be performed the gymnasts. Yet belying these changes was a discourse within the WTC that rued the new acrobatic direction of the sport. These conflicting ideas are reconciled when it is understood it was not acrobatization that was mourned, but rather its consequent cohort of young, pre-pubescent gymnasts who could not present the feminine artistry that had defined

\textsuperscript{381} ‘Proposals from the Federations,’ in *FIG Bulletin*, vol. 94, (September 1977): 92.

\textsuperscript{382} ‘Proposals Made by the Federations,’ in *FIG Bulletin*, vol. 84, (March 1975): 81.
the sport since its birth. These findings highlight that fears over contemporary gymnastics’ loss of artistry, are perhaps not a uniquely modern problem. Moreover, it foreshadows problems to come in the decades following, as the abundance of child athletes in the 1970s, 80s and 90s brought negative publicity to the sport. But these concerns were not immediately the most pressing for the FIG, which was under pressure to maintain gymnastics’ inclusion in the Olympics. Perhaps influenced by increasing accountability to the IOC, or maybe as a result of new leadership, the FIG also became more aware of problems with the judging system in the 1970s. Beyond simple bias, sources here show that scores were in fact fixed on several occasions – mostly between Eastern bloc nations – culminating most visibly in Comaneci’s ‘artificially created’ 10s. But despite such organizational and operational problems, WAG’s surge in popularity had important consequences in how the sport was valued in the public sphere.
Chapter Four

Cold Warriors: Gymnastics Tours and Flic Flac Diplomacy

One of the most significant repercussions of WAG’s newfound popularity was the subsequent rise in international gymnastics tours – teams of elite gymnasts touring foreign nations and providing gymnastics shows in packed arenas. This chapter explores how WAG was popularized by the emerging ‘celebrity athletes’ of this decade, and promoted through their resulting tours. It then uses the frameworks of Ping-Pong diplomacy and news framing to make meaning of WAG’s new cultural value, suggesting how these tours contributed to facilitating the Cold War détente of this period, while representing contemporary internal debates of the IOC.

The Popularization Of Gymnastics: Olga Korbut, Nadia Comaneci, and the ‘Celebrity Athlete’

The rise of the ‘celebrity athlete’ in gymnastics was a critical foundation for the development of gymnastics-based diplomacy. This happened in 1972 at the Munich Olympics where Soviet gymnast Korbut introduced a new risky brand of gymnastics different from the balletic style that had previously characterized the sport. She performed somersaults in her bar routine, and tumbled on the beam: she was the poster girl for the sport’s new acrobatic direction, and audiences loved it. Roslyn Kerr and Natalie Barker-Ruchti observed that such performances transformed the sport into a spectacle, while Wendy Varney added that it was easy for audiences

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383 Barker-Ruchti, 'Ballerinas and Pixies,' 56; and Kerr, 'The Impact of Nadia Comaneci on the Sport of Women’s Artistic Gymnastics,' 94.
untrained in gymnastics to digest. But just as important to her impact was her personality. Western audiences, accustomed to the poker face norm of Soviet athletes, empathized with her joy as she took the lead on several events, and her devastation upon making an elementary error that snatched the gold from within reach. If she appeared to show unrehearsed emotion as she laughed and smiled in her performances, Korbut herself eventually acknowledged she had been coached to smile at all the correct times in order to provide an entertainment package. Korbut had dramatized WAG.

Meanwhile, in the Romanian town of Onesti, a husband and wife coaching team had selected children from local primary schools to take part in an experimental gymnastics school, based on the state-controlled Soviet training system. One coach was an expert in gymnastics, while the other brought psychological, strategic, and strength and conditioning notions from a range of other sports including athletics, handball, rugby and boxing. Together Bela and Marta Károlyi added a consistently high standard of execution and enormous consistency to the mixture of difficulty, risk, spectacle, and youth. While there had been glimpses of this program’s success before 1976, it was at the Montreal Olympics that the rest of the world learned of gymnastics’ new prodigy, Nadia Comaneci.

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384 Varney, 'A Labour of Patriotism,' 49.
385 Korbut recalled her coach Renald Knysh’s words to her in her autobiography: ‘Smile! Otherwise, the spectator will see how hard you're working, and the illusion will be lost.’ Korbut and Emerson-White, My Story; and in Varney, 'A Labour of Patriotism,' 1.
386 Karolyi and Richardson, Feel No Fear, 8-9, 12-16, 22, 39.
387 Ibid., 45 – 51. Comaneci first caught the attention of the gymnastics world when she won the All-Around competition against the previously unbeatable Soviets at her international competition: the Friendship Cup in Bulgaria, 1972. In 1975 in Skien,
These athletes were not simply astounding the gymnastics community, they captured the interest of a larger audience than WAG had previously enjoyed. One *Sports Illustrated* article from 1976 claims a fivefold increase in participation in gymnastics at American clubs due to Korbut and Comaneci’s popularity.\(^{388}\) Seizing on the publicity WAG was attracting after Korbut’s celebrity, gymnasts began to be used to strengthen international relationships, following the precedent set by Ping-Pong diplomacy.

**Analytical Frameworks**

Ping-Pong diplomacy was a form of sports diplomacy between China and the USA throughout the era of détente. ‘Sports diplomacy,’ wrote Bishnupriya Padhi, ‘is when sport is used as a political tool for enhancement, but which sometimes, worsens diplomatic relations between two countries.’\(^{389}\) One of the most famous examples of its positive effects is so called Ping-Pong diplomacy: the 1971 table tennis matches between the US and China that led to a thaw in Sino-American relations. When the captains of the two teams shared a bus ride together and began a friendship that was captured by the press in images of the smiling pair, an invitation was extended for the American team to play a series of exhibition matches in China.\(^{390}\) The use of athletes was a form of ‘people’s diplomacy;’ where ‘civil society initiatives utilize agents and activities without any formal political status in lieu of more formal

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390 Thomas F. Carter and John Sugden, 'The USA and Sporting Diplomacy: Comparing and Contrasting the Cases of Table Tennis with China and Baseball with Cuba in the 1970s,' *International Relations*, 26, no. 1 (2012).
political and diplomatic developments." Such a policy offered the benefit of being both high profile and well-publicized, with little risk of political fallout because none of the actors held official political roles. In the context of wider political tremors between Beijing and Washington, Ping-Pong diplomacy made a successful and highly visible contribution to thawing Sino-American relations. Carter and Sugden observed: ‘the table tennis initiative between China and the United States paved the way for restoration of diplomatic relations between the two powers…’ Indeed, the efforts of the table tennis athletes foreshadowed Nixon’s first trip to China a year later.

There are clear parallels for Soviet-American diplomacy through gymnastics, which appeared only a few years later and also contributed to a thaw in relations, preceding high-level political meetings. With the model set by the Chinese encounter, the United States looked to employ this method with other hostile nations, such as Cuba (through baseball), and as this chapter asserts, the Soviet Union conducted similar diplomacy with the US and Australia through gymnastics.

To give significance to such meetings, it is crucial to understand the way in which both athletes and the encounters were represented in the media and presented to the public. As such, the second analytical framework employed in this chapter is that of news-framing. ‘Frames do much more than structure meaning,’ asserted Michelle Murray-Yang. ‘They are the means by which societal leaders craft reality.’ Further to this, Van Gorp observed that ‘part of the power of frames

391 Ibid., 106.
392 Ibid., 107.
393 Ibid.
394 William A. Gamson and Andrew Modigliani, ‘Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach,’ American Journal of Sociology 95, no.1
comes from their ability to blend in easily with and become part of everyday culture so that they are viewed as normal components of social discourse. Through employing this understanding of news-framing, the rising popularity of the Eastern bloc gymnasts, and their subsequent use in diplomacy can be understood more clearly as a result of concerted efforts to challenge perceptions of Soviet athletes.

‘Flic Flac Diplomacy’: The Use of Female Gymnasts in Cold War Politics

Transplanting the concept of Ping-Pong diplomacy to other political human movement endeavours, Tracy Ying Zhang described the use of Chinese circus acrobats in Sino-US relations as ‘people to people exchanges replacing high-level political meetings and conferences’ during the Cold War. With the similarities of circus and gymnastics performance, this analysis becomes all the more important in the context of WAG’s ideological usage. It was a precedent that can also be applied to the use of celebrity Eastern bloc gymnasts such as Korbut and Comaneci: thus ‘flic flac diplomacy,’ the impacts of which were varied for all involved. First, it is necessary to suggest reasons Eastern bloc governments chose gymnasts to be used in diplomacy, before assessing the success of this exercise in public relations through exploring audiences’ perceptions of the athletes. It was these efforts that gave political power to the Eastern bloc representatives and saw them included in


395 Yang, 'Guilty without Trial,' 83.


397 A flic-flac is one of the fundamental skills in Artistic Gymnastics, similar in importance to a handstand or cartwheel. It is a backward salto, sectioned into two phases from feet to hands, then hands to feet.
diplomatic meetings.

The gymnasts and their acrobatics can be seen as embodied, stylized cultural exports promoted by the State to demonstrate ideological superiority. \(^{398}\) The continual success of Soviet athletes demonstrated the general fitness and athletic abilities of their people, but more so the efficacy of the systematic production of elite athletes. At the same time, aesthetic innovation promoted through circus and ballet influences in WAG \(^{399}\) paid homage to important Russian cultural traditions. Gymnastic performances transcended linguistic barriers, offering alternative forms of communication with Western audiences.

As the embodiment of the new style of difficult, acrobatic elements, combined with traditional ballet techniques, Korbut was inevitably central to Soviet use of gymnasts in diplomacy. Moreover, her celebrity status rendered her crucial to the Soviet diplomatic effort. However, historian Sylvain Dufraisse found that the need to include her was a source of concern for the Soviet sports authorities, who could not trust her unruly, unpredictable nature, and were not impressed with her behaviour abroad. But when Korbut was later not included on a US tour, the American organizers cancelled it. Due to her celebrity status, Korbut was a necessary ambassador in Soviet sports diplomacy. \(^{400}\) As Sovetsky Sport declared in 1973 ‘the foreign policy of our Party and government is reflected in international sports relations which must play their part in establishing firm foundations of mutual understanding and friendship between our peoples.’ \(^{401}\) So shortly after her Olympic

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\(^{398}\) Zhang, 'Bending the Body for China.'

\(^{399}\) Barker-Ruchti, \textit{Women's Artistic Gymnastics}, 147.


\(^{401}\) Riordan, \textit{Sport in Soviet Society}, 379.
success in 1972, she and the Soviet WAG team toured several Western nations including the USA, Australia and Great Britain, performing and raising money for the government at home, as well as engaging in public relations appearances to bolster the political image of the nation.402

The American Tours

Following their Olympic success and Korbut’s newfound celebrity, there was much interest in the Soviet gymnasts when they toured the US in 1973, or as one article put it: when the ‘pixies invaded the US’.403 This quote epitomizes the contradiction of the gymnastic tour for Western audiences: hailing from enemy territory it was labelled an invasion, yet consisting of slight young females, the group was considered nonthreatening, childlike ‘pixies’. Included in the tour group that year were Korbut and Ludmilla Tourischeva, along with Rusiko Skharulidze, Tamara Lazakovich, Antonina Koshel, and Lubov Bogdanova. A seven city tour, which left from Houston and included sold-out performances in Los Angeles and Maryland, ended with a show at New York's Madison Square Garden, where an audience of 20,000 threw roses to their Soviet ‘idols’.404 A year later a further 19,000 people returned to see Korbut at Madison Square Garden, where she and her teammates raised over $150,000.405 Indeed, Korbut was continuously employed with various

402 Gerald Eskenazi, 'Even Her Quotes Are Guarded,' New York Times, 23 March 1973. The 1973 tour was reported to have raised approximately $56,000 USD at the time.
teammates to continue her American tours in 1975\textsuperscript{406} and 1976.

The demands of this gruelling programme did not sit well with her. She felt she had no time to train on tour, as her skills slipped below par internationally. ‘I was exhausted before ‘76. I can tell you the government used me for money. It’s not good.’\textsuperscript{407} A running theme in Korbut’s reflections was overstretching herself with little benefit to her person: money was instead being sent over her head to the ‘fat big-shots on the Sports Committee’ back home.\textsuperscript{408} To this end, when Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin set up a meeting with Nixon, she refused to meet the President until it was clarified that she would be able to reschedule her training session to after the appointment.\textsuperscript{409} The exhausting schedule did little to help her prepare for the next Olympics in Montreal in 1976. Meanwhile the tours provided a more positive experience for lesser-known gymnasts such as Nellie Kim who likely benefited from the international exposure before their Olympic debut.

While the tours drew crowds largely thanks to Korbut’s popularity, several newspaper articles and spectator interviews indicated awareness that Korbut was not the top gymnast on the team. While people recognized superior gymnasts such as Tourischeva, the crowds were the loudest for Korbut.\textsuperscript{410} Such instances highlight the importance of Korbut as an individual and her ability to relate to Westerners. Indeed, outside the tours, newspapers revelled in reporting on the daily activities and impressions of the Soviet athletes.


\textsuperscript{408} Varney, 'A Labour of Patriotism,' 48.

\textsuperscript{409} Levy, 'Olga Korbut's Olympic Journey,' 3 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{410} Cady, 'Soviet Gymnasts Keep Garden Crowd in a Whirl; and and Eskenazi, 'Olga: Overshadowed; 19,694 Don't Care.'
American Responses to Soviet Tours: Westernization of Soviets

As well as encompassing reviews of the shows, media coverage of these tours focused on making Korbut a relatable figure for her American audiences. For instance, in 1973, she was asked what her favourite fruit was, and it was reported that her favourite singer was Tom Jones. Commentary on the gymnasts’ gradual Westernization over their years of tours included reminiscence of Soviet excitement during their early tours, when they bought years’ supplies of jeans. Keen to report on the Americanization of the group, in 1976, the New York Times reported their enjoyment of a ‘beer and pizza party,’ dancing at a disco, watching a professional football game, seeing movies like Carrie and King Kong and visiting Disney World.

In feeding the public interest, Korbut’s reported Americanization enhanced the impression that East and West were growing closer. Media reportage of Korbut presented the public understanding of a thaw in the Cold War. Scholar Ann Kordas observed: ‘if any one Soviet citizen was responsible for convincing Americans that not all Soviets posed a threat to the American way of life, it was the eighty-four-pound ‘soldier’ Olga Korbut’. Indeed, non-threatening portrayals and perceptions of the diminutive gymnasts ultimately steered them towards a 1973 meeting at the

413 Ibid.
White House, giving their international endeavours not only public relations significance, but political meaning in détente.415

‘Yes I Met The President – He’s A Nice Guy’416

During the 1973 tour, Korbut and her teammates were sent to the White House to meet with President Nixon. There, he spoke of America’s appreciation of the gymnasts, as well as America’s ideas for future relations between the US and the USSR.417 Such encounters highlight the use of these young female athletes in Cold War diplomatic efforts towards détente.

Following an exchange of banter in the Oval Office about the disparity in height between the President and Korbut, Nixon commented on the gymnasts’ remarkable ability always to land on their feet, despite their complicated aerial manoeuvres. He joked that politicians would be lucky to have this cat-like skill. Amid the gymnasts’ laughter, he focused on the crux of their meeting:

But most important, I want you to know that we welcome you not simply because of your athletic achievements, but because you represent the youth of your country. And whatever the differences between leaders may be, we think that the young people of the world can live in peace.418

Korbut’s main memory of this incident was subsequent word from top Soviet officials that it had been more successful in strengthening relations between the USA

416 Eskenazi, 'Even Her Quotes Are Guarded.'
417 The White House, 'Memorandum of Conversation.'
and USSR than if they had sent their top diplomats. At the time she was unaware she was ‘kind of melting the ice between the countries’. But then ambassador Dobrynin said, “Thank you very much. You did for one visit what we could do for five years”. Together these comments indicate the success of the Soviet policy of using gymnasts to facilitate détente.

The meeting between the President and the gymnasts was both high profile and relatively low-risk, a tactical manoeuvre to break the ice before political leaders met to pursue high-level diplomacy. The White House encounter was a precursor to the Brezhnev-Nixon meeting in the US several months later in June 1973, where they signed nine accords including an Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear Arms. While the Soviet gymnasts were unquestionably used as tools, their foray into sports diplomacy was not unusual: international visibility for top athletes was a fundamental tenet of Soviet sport. As James Riordan observed in 1977: ‘The Soviet Union is not slow to capitalize on international sporting success by using its outstanding sportsmen as ‘ambassadors of goodwill,’ not infrequently as a ‘try-out’ for political initiatives.’

**Romanian Gymnastics Tours**

While Korbut reached the highest echelons of sporting embassy in the US, Comaneci was detached from both politics and her adoring public. Like Korbut's, Comaneci’s US tours followed her stellar performances at the Olympic Games, touted by

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420 Ibid.
Romanian leader Ceausescu as representative of the regime’s success. Indeed, an American tour was planned within days of her first appearances at Montreal. But there is much less reportage about these tours than about Korbut’s, probably due to the smaller scale and frequency of the Romanian tours.

Another reason news of Comaneci’s presence in the US might not have saturated press reports was her ‘serious’ personality. ‘Comaneci never smiled, never flirted with the crowd as Korbut always had,’ observed one Sports Illustrated article. ‘There was fervent applause for her brilliance, but no love affair.’ A letter to the editor of the New York Times reflects similar perceptions of Comaneci among the general public: there was respect for her athleticism, awe over her performances, but no emotional attachment to the athlete.

One of the most incredible phenomena of recent years in sports is the barrage of criticism directed at Comaneci for possessing a normal, rather pleasant personality rather than satisfying the insatiable demands of the press and public by being “cute,” “charming,” “lovable,” or hyperemotional.

Certainly, when Comaneci finally made it to America for exhibitions at the end of 1977, after having cancelled earlier appearances in March, the coverage of these events focused on her changed appearance and failure to engage the audience. Disappointed that ‘this was not the Nadia of fifteen months ago,’ New York Times journalist Robin Herman was sharply critical of a maturing Comaneci. ‘Her shiny

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423 In her autobiography, Nadia recalled ‘I was a national treasure because I made my government’s rule and way of life look good.’ Comaneci, Letters to a Young Gymnast, 64.


pony tail had been cropped in favour of a shaggy haircut in need of a shampoo, and her formerly slim muscular form had turned almost hefty.’ The same journalist was equally uninspired by the show, calling her Madison Square Garden performance ‘decidedly mundane and brief.’ ‘It was almost an hour into the programme before Miss Comaneci had the floor to herself, running through a comfortable balance-beam routine that featured only a forward somersault as the most daring move.’ Moreover, away from competition and devoid of any particularly spectacular elements, ‘there was a severe lack of drama in the presentation’.

Notwithstanding Comaneci’s relative lack of charisma, her tours may have also received less coverage because they were less well orchestrated than the Soviet tours. First, Comaneci fell ill, forcing her presence in the March 1977 shows to be cancelled across five cities. Then an earthquake in Romania prevented the gymnasts from attending New York, where Comaneci was to collect a $10,000 prize for the Pinch Woman Athlete of the World. When Comaneci and her cohort finally managed their first American tour in October 1977, media had little access to the gymnasts. ‘A stern group of Rumanian federation officials that attended yesterday’s performances at the Garden… forbid any interviews of Miss Comaneci or the rest of the young Rumanians by American journalists.’ Then again in 1978, a six city Romanian tour was ‘abruptly cancelled without notice’. Given the mediocre contribution to public relations achieved by Romanian tours, no political meetings

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430 Herman, 'A New-Look Miss Comaneci at the Garden.'
were organized and the Romanian gymnasts’ contribution to détente was negligible. Because her celebrity was rooted in her extraordinary feats in Montreal, not her personality, neither at the Games nor on tour did Comaneci challenge ideas about the Eastern bloc, nor did she appear a relatable, Americanized gymnast. It is likely that this less than warm relationship with the public contributed to the lack of interest in and commentary on her tours. At the same time, the tours provided little benefit for the Romanian gymnasts, distracting them from their training and competition preparations.

**Amateurism and the Australian Tour**

Meanwhile, there is even less coverage of the Soviet tours to Australia. While Australian newspapers on *Trove* carry a record of advertisements for the gymnastics displays, unlike the American tours there is scant evidence of their reception, nor did the Soviet gymnasts engage in any overtly political meetings. The meaning for Australians was not a story of Westernization or friendly political relations played out in the media; rather the Australian tour became a site to contest the amateur status of the Soviet gymnasts, albeit not in the public sphere. The Australian representative to the IOC sent press clippings of the tours to the IOC President, accusing the Soviet Union of having breached the rules of amateurism. Consequently, analysis of the Australian tour must focus less on cultural reception and more on the Olympic politics of the time.

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The 1970s were a transitioning decade for the IOC. The 1972 Olympics were Brundage’s last. Under his idealistic rule, athletes could only be eligible for Olympic competition if they remained amateurs, receiving no compensation for any activity related to sport. When Lord Killanin succeeded Brundage, the movement began a slow shift away from the zealous amateurism of the latter, although the amateur rule remained in place.\textsuperscript{432} As the Games began to modernize, the amateur rules were inconsistently enforced, and as Allen Guttmann observed, by 1980 they were regarded as an ‘international joke’.\textsuperscript{433} Meanwhile sport historians Lenskyj and Wagg reflected that ‘on the question of amateurism, a public condemnation of some infraction by the IOC during this period was a reliable indication of their tacit acceptance of it.’\textsuperscript{434} This lack of clarity over the amateur rules was clearly revealed in the Australian reception of the Soviet gymnastic tours, which the Australian IOC member, Hugh Weir, saw as profiting from sporting success and thus ruling the gymnasts ineligible for further Olympic competition.

IOC archives demonstrate that shortly after Korbut’s success in early 1973, the President of the Australian Amateur Gymnastics Union (AAGU, a precursor to the AGF), Jim Barry, worked with Perth’s Channel 7 and the Michael Edgley touring company to bring the Soviet gymnastics team down under in 1974.\textsuperscript{435} In a tour manifest, organizer B.S. Treasure indicated the twelve performances scheduled in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Guttmann, \textit{The Olympics}, 142-143; and and Lenskyj and Wagg, \textit{The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies}, 235.
\item Guttmann, \textit{The Olympics}, 177.
\item Lenskyj and Wagg, \textit{The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies}, 330.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Sydney were to be a gathering of gymnastics icons, including the likes of such Olympic gold medallists as Nikolai Andrianov and Victor Klimenko in MAG, while the women’s team had an all star line up including Elvira Saadi, Kim, Tourischeva and Korbut. Once the tour was organized and advertisements began to run in the newspapers Weir wrote to IOC President Lord Michael Killanin with concerns over the gymnasts’ amateur status. Weir was a prominent member of the old guard in the IOC, leading its Eligibility Commission – the body which dealt with the issue of amateurism. He must have been surprised to see this happen on his home ground:

This exercise is a purely commercial promotion in the entertainment field and has no connection whatsoever with the Australian Gymnastic Federation… I am sure no one in this country believes the gymnasts are performing for love of sport and this presentation is not being promoted on a purely commercial and professional basis… Whether it is all above board and quite valid in accordance with the rules of amateur status, I cannot help feeling that the arrangement is not only unwise but certainly undesirable.

Although by no means as fanatical as his predecessor Avery Brundage, Killanin was a supporter of amateurism and sympathized with Weir’s views. ‘My sentiments are identical to Mr Weir’s but without facts and good advice I am not sure what can be done,’ he wrote in a letter to the IOC technical director. He re-emphasized this

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437 Hugh Weir (IOC Member for Australia), 'Soviet Gymnastics Tour,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 3 December 1974.

438 Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 'International Gymnastics Federation,' Letter to Henry Banks (IOC Technical Director), 12 December 1974, in International
opinion when he replied to Hugh Weir too: ‘…Certainly this would appear to be a purely show business venture.’ Killanin commissioned the IOC Technical Director, Henry Banks, to request more information from the FIG to determine the tour’s legality. Killanin observed:

There is to my mind, a considerable difference between (a) an Olympic competitor who turns professional, (b) individual Olympic competitors who may give performances for charity or sports fund-raising and (c) what would appear to be the case in Australia of a complete commercialization of the Russian Gymnastic Olympic team.

But when the IOC contacted the FIG about the Australian tour, FIG secretary Max Bangerter denied any knowledge of it. ‘If Mr Bangerter had known about this show before it took place, he would have written to the Russian Federation to tell them that the FIG would certainly not agree to it,’ read Banks’ report. ‘… If they did appear, the consequence would be not to allow the gymnasts concerned to take part in further FIG competitions.’

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440 Ibid.


This view fed into a narrative also espoused by Killanin, of gymnastics as a ‘pure’ sport ‘from an Olympic point of view; one not plagued by professional cheats’.\textsuperscript{443} But attitudes were changing in light of the increasing difficulty of the sport, discussed above. ‘To obtain the present high standard required for a gold medal the training would appear to be as long and as dedicated as that of becoming a ballerina,’ observed Killanin.\textsuperscript{444} Indeed, this was one of the growing problems of allowing the Soviet gymnasts into the Games, and the ripple effect they had on the sports in which they excelled: more training was needed to win.

However, Olympic archives demonstrate Banks’ and Weir’s sentiments were not quite accurate. There were clear records of intention to follow all the correct channels in the organization of this tour. First, there was a letter from the AAGU President, Jim Barry, agreeing to assist the two private companies arranging the promotional tour.\textsuperscript{445} Then, a response from the tour companies indicates first, that the Russian Ministry of Sport insisted that the proper Olympic bodies be notified, and second, that the AAGU should correspond in the resulting negotiations with the FIG paying $500.\textsuperscript{446} This was negligible compared to the revenue from other parties:

\textsuperscript{443} Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 'Re: Russian Gymnastic Team,' Letter to Hugh Weir (IOC Member for Australia), 12 December 1974.

\textsuperscript{444} Hugh Weir (IOC Member for Australia), 'Soviet Gymnastics Tour,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 3 December 1974.


the touring company was to pay $2500 to the AAGU and the Russian Ministry of Sport was to receive $10,000 plus 50 per cent of the proceeds from the tour.\footnote{Hugh Weir (IOC Member for Australia), 'Russian Gymnastic Team,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 15 February 1975, in \textit{International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1960-1976}, SD5 1975-1976: D-RM02-GYMNA/004, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).}

In response to Weir’s and Killanin’s inquiries, Bangerter shifted responsibility to the national federations, leaving the IOC to follow up this time with the AAGU as well as the Russian Gymnastics Federation. ‘Mr Bangerter stressed that the Affiliated Federation in the country must agree to any proposal [for foreign tours or competition]… he was quite definite that [Australia] would not allow this commercialization…’\footnote{Henry Banks (IOC Technical Director), 'International Gymnastic Federation,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 14 January 1975.} However the IOC declared this was clearly a matter for the FIG to deal with.

\begin{quote}
It would appear that this is solely a matter for the FIG to sort out and take what appropriate action deemed fit… it is not at this stage a matter which calls of action by the IOC except to express the view that exploitation of amateur athletes purely for commercial purposes such as I have described is undesirable.\footnote{Hugh Weir (IOC Member for Australia), 'Russian Gymnastic Team,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 15 February 1975.}
\end{quote}

Correspondence between the AAGU and FIG, the two parties supposed to be making sure the tour was legitimately amateur, is conspicuously absent from these files.

Moreover, Banks’ report to the IOC stated that Bangerter ‘could not believe that the best Russians, such as Korbut etc. were there – probably they were lower grade gymnasts. He anticipated the Russians will reply that it was not their National
Olympic Team, but only a team from a town or club… Nonetheless a special issue of *The Australian Gymnast* from 1975 provides photographic evidence of Korbut and several of her national teammates performing in Australia. Moreover, Korbut, Kim and Saadi, continued to compete in FIG competitions including the next Olympic Games. Clearly there was some miscommunication between the AAGU, FIG and IOC.

While there was some confusion over the legality of Olympic athletes engaging in publicity tours, clearly there were few repercussions. This correspondence, although unfortunately incomplete, is significant due to the stir the Australian tour apparently caused. Given Korbut’s fame and the widely publicized and relatively frequent American tours, it seems strange that the Australian tour would spark such controversy within the Olympic movement, and it is difficult to speculate why such scandal erupted in this corner of the world. The most likely suggestion is that, rather than Australia feeling threatened by the popularity of the enemy gymnasts, this resistance came down to Weir’s position within the IOC and his knowledge of the gymnastics tours in his home country.

**Conclusion**

The implications of these different tours were manifold. For the Olympic movement, they can be seen as emblematic of the post-Brundage transition away from amateurism and towards professionalism. The confusion over the Australian tour indicates the shadowy rules surrounding athletic exhibitions. Although the athletes received no payment themselves, gymnastics was undoubtedly commercializing. For

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450 Henry Banks (IOC Technical Director), 'International Gymnastic Federation,' Letter to Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), 14 January 1975.

the gymnasts, it may have undermined the training of some such as Korbut, while for others, such as Kim, it provided an opportunity to experience international exposure before important competitions. For the governments who sent the gymnasts overseas, it was an effective exercise in revenue gathering, with the added bonuses of promoting an Eastern bloc way of life. The cultural popularity of the Olympic gymnasts abroad enabled them to be used as political emissaries. While the Romanian government was less strategic with its tours, the Soviet Union was able to use Korbut as a symbol of goodwill preceding official talks, which strengthened East-West ties and helped facilitate détente.

After détente, in which the Cold War exerted a subtle, behind-the-scenes effect on gymnastics, the 1980s were a stark contrast. The conflict exploded to the forefront of Olympic politics, with two large-scale boycotts having an immense impact on the Games and their sports. It was not simply that a large number of nations boycotted the Games, but that the nations that boycotted, the USA and allies in 1980, and the Soviet Union and allies in 1984, were key players within the Olympic movement. Such events forced the IOC to re-examine its role in politics, while power in WAG was also reshaped. Particularly as a result of the Eastern bloc absence from the 1984 Games, the US was able to seize its first victories in WAG. Meanwhile, the political troubles of the time de-centralized important technical and strategic knowledge in WAG, as Eastern-bloc defectors contributed to the rapid improvement of Western countries. Moreover, changing economic opportunities under new IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, who began a mission to professionalize the Games, saw the balance of power in WAG shift westward. The FIG was forced to grapple with these changes, while also continuing to monitor the development of the sport: from the top down, supervising judging, and monitoring new trends in the sport emerging from the bottom up. Inevitably amongst all these factors, some things slipped, setting up the sport for some serious criticism in the following decade.

Chapter five deals with the politics of the Olympic boycotts of this decade through examination of American and Australian newspapers along with archival sources from the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne. The discussions surrounding the boycotts – both public and private – are at the forefront of enquiry, as I aim to elucidate the sentiment around them. Chapter six builds on this context to explore how power and knowledge were redistributed in the 1980s as the sport globalized.
and, to an extent, professionalized. Here, the creation of the AIS acts as a metaphor expressing the culmination of these factors, which, I argue, were crucial to the developments of WAG in the 1980s.
Chapter Five

The Devolution of Détente: Cold War Boycotts and the Olympic Movement

In 1974 Moscow had been selected as the site of the 1980 Olympics, but in the months leading up to the event, the Games became hostage to a political stand-off between East and West. In July 1979, American President Jimmy Carter surreptitiously approved American aid to anti-Soviet groups in Afghanistan. On Christmas Day that same year, the Soviet Union officially launched its military campaign to help the pro-Soviet communists hold power. In response, on the 4th of January 1980, the United States, backed by the European Commission, declared a grain embargo against the Soviet Union, and raised the possibility of an Olympic boycott. On the 20th of January, Carter announced an ultimatum: if the Games were not moved from Moscow, the United States would boycott. The ensuing boycotts were not only significant in Olympic history, they were representative of the disintegration of the détente that had marked the preceding decade.

This chapter relies on print media sources to examine the public discussions surrounding the boycotts. I sought not only to piece together the events leading to the Olympics, but more importantly, discover the public sentiment towards them. The


455 Guttmann, 'The Cold War and the Olympics,' 559.
chapter explores the following questions: to what extent did the public support the boycotts? How did its attitudes differ from the sentiments of sports leaders? What was the reaction within gymnastics circles? And how did such responses vary between the US and Australia? The answers are then compared with correspondence from within the IOC archives.

In exploring the Olympic politics of this decade chronologically, I explore first Western perspectives on the 1980 boycott in the public sphere, before comparison with those of the gymnastics community. Then the Soviet Union’s last minute withdrawal from the 1984 Games is examined. It reveals that, in marked contrast to Brundage's refusal to accept the relationship between sport and politics, the IOC under Killanin, followed more rigorously by Samaranch, played an increasingly political role, both protecting the Games and securing the Olympic Movement’s relevance, role and power in an increasingly interconnected world. The changes were timely because of the emergence of a rival competition: the Goodwill Games. The effects of these political oscillations are then briefly discussed in terms of WAG at the 1980 and 1984 Games.

The 1980 Boycott

On the 21st of March, Carter announced the United States’ decision to go ahead with the boycott of the Moscow Games. While the Olympic Games may seem an odd target for diplomatic protest, this was not the first time they had been used for political purposes.456 Indeed, exploring the 1980 Games, Guttmann observed: ‘An

456 To name a few examples: the 1976 Games were boycotted by many African nations in protest over race issues, the 1972 Games were host to the infamous Munich Massacre, and the 1968 Games were the site of Tommie Smith and John Carlos’ black power salute – a protest over race issues in the US.
Olympic boycott is obviously a weak and ineffectual weapon, but it was attractively available and relatively inexpensive in political as well as economic terms. Moreover, in the wake of the American hostage crisis in Tehran, Carter felt immense pressure to take some kind of decisive action. Ironically, he announced the boycott only three years after his Commission on Olympic Sports had ‘deplored the actions of governments which deny an athlete the right to take part in international competition’. The United States called upon its allies to join the boycott through pressure on their National Olympic Committees (NOCs). According to the secretary of the British Olympic Association (BOA), during the Lake Placid Winter Games the Central Intelligence Agency approached all such committees seen as potentially sympathetic to ascertain their attitudes to, and support for a boycott.

The Australian Reaction to the Call to Boycott

While Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser was keen to join his American allies in the boycott, the Australian Olympic Federation (AOF) was not. In January 1980, Fraser wrote to the AOF, asking that the Australian Olympic committee join the United States’ and other NOCs to express to the IOC the view that if Soviet troops did not withdraw, Moscow would become unsuitable as a site. At a meeting of representatives from each state and each summer Olympic sport, the AOF decided to

457 Guttmann, 'The Cold War and the Olympics,' 559.
460 'The Olympic Decision,' Canberra Times, 24 May 1980. Fraser’s request for the AOF to boycott the Games was discussed at a full federation conference in conjunction with representatives from all states and all sports involved in the Summer Olympics.
decline in the interest of Olympism, its president Syd Grange believing ‘the interests of the athletes must come first… [The] Olympics can't be isolated from events that shape the world, but I question the effectiveness of a boycott of that nature.’

The Secretary of the Federation, Judy Patching, suggested the call for a boycott came from ‘politicians seeking personal mileage,’ a view repeated in several American sources.

After the AOF failed to back him, Fraser put pressure directly onto the national sport federations, offering funding boosts to those agreeing to the boycott. A later enquiry found that ‘between June and December 1980 more than $524,000 had been paid to sporting organizations and individual athletes who chose not to compete in Moscow.’ According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, that would equate to $2.15 million Australian dollars in 2015’s currency. In America, financial coercion was also used to encourage the USOC to agree to boycott.

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461 ‘Afghanistan Reaction: Games Boycott Not Favoured,’ *Canberra Times*, 14 January 1980.

462 Ibid. For example, this view appeared often in the *International Gymnast* magazine issues of 1980.

463 ‘Sport Grant Follows Boycott Support,’ *Canberra Times*, 1 April 1980.


Congressional leaders indicated that the USOC’s status might cease to be tax-exempt, while donors to the USOC were pressured to withhold funds.\footnote{Dick Criley, '1980 Summer Olympics?,' \textit{International Gymnast}, June 1980.}

Surprisingly, in the face of their impending inclusion in the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), the AGF maintained their idealistic separation of sport and politics, sending two female and one male gymnast.\footnote{According the competition results, the two females were Kerry Bayliss and Marina Sulicich, while the male was Lindsay Nyuland. Sports Reference, 'Sr/Olympics.'} AGF President Jim Barry explained: ‘we are placing our trust in the Olympic ideal and that the Olympic movement will be able to surmount this particular problem’.\footnote{James E. Barry, 'President's Report,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 10, no. 2, July 1980.}

Despite potentially risking gymnastics’ inclusion in the imminent AIS program, the AGF’s decision was vindicated by their best result to date, with both the men and women qualifying for the All-Around final competition (competition II).\footnote{James Barry, 'President's Message,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 10, no. 3, October 1980.} By October 1980, it was Barry’s ‘distinct impression that the healing process was well underway and the final results have done much to remove the divisive situation that pertained’.\footnote{Ibid.}

### Calls For an Alternative Venue

In addition to the call for boycott, there were demands for an alternative to the Moscow venue. Fraser’s was one such voice, recommending to the IOC that ‘the Games should be transferred to another site or sites or be cancelled for 1980’.\footnote{‘Soviet Must Withdraw: Fraser Asking for Olympics Boycott,' \textit{Canberra Times}, 23 January 1980.}

United States congressman Clarence E. Miller wrote to President Carter in early
January of his plans to introduce legislation to the American Congress to move the Games from Moscow with the pressured assistance of the IOC.\textsuperscript{472} This latter example reflects Sarantakes’ observation that ‘Carter and many of his subordinates never seriously respected the Olympic ideology,’ and that ‘they even lacked basic knowledge about the structure of international sports… assuming that the IOC had a political structure that was similar to that of the United Nations’.\textsuperscript{473}

Indeed, the IOC was not an organization to bow to such pressure, nor did American Congress have any jurisdiction over the matter. Notwithstanding the organizational problems of an eleventh hour change of venue, the IOC’s continuing commitment to Coubertin’s ideal of the separation of sport and politics led Lord Killanin to respond with a threat to American involvement in the Olympic movement:

The United States Olympic committee has publicly taken the absolutely correct line up to now in regard to the Olympic Games but it would appear that President Carter and members of your Government are not aware of the Olympic Rules. Naturally, should they issue instructions not to accept the invitation to Moscow, I think the USOC would be in complete conflict with Rule 24 (c) regarding its autonomy which could have very dangerous repercussions for Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{474}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{473} Sarantakes, \textit{Dropping the Torch}, 262.
\item\textsuperscript{474} Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), Letter to IOC Members in the United States: Douglas Roby and Julian Roosevelt, 16 January 1980, in \textit{Biography and Correspondence of Douglas Roby, 1952-1980: SD 5- Correspondence 1979-1980: CIO}
\end{footnotes}
With the IOC resolute in its decision, the 1980 Moscow Games went ahead without the United States and select allies. Some athletes from boycotting nations competed under the Olympic Flag, while those from non-boycotting sports in New Zealand competed under the flag of their National Olympic Committee, symbolizing their independence from a government opposed to their participation.  

The BOA accepted their invitation to the Games, much to the dismay of their government. Conversely, Canada, initially opposed to a boycott, came around to the idea, joined by Israel and Japan. In total, 81 nations participated in the Games, while 62 boycotted (although not all over the Afghanistan issue).

**Repercussions**

Boycotting the Games affected not only the competitions, but also had ramifications regarding power affiliations of those governing world sport. On the 19th of May 1980, President Carter and his advisors had met with Lord Killanin and Monique Berlioux in the Oval Office. A confidential report on the meeting reveals that Lord Killanin warned Carter of the repercussions on the governance of world sport through the political affiliations of IF members.

Firstly, [Americans] had taken no action when the Eastern representatives were taking over the international federations. Now, it would be difficult to oppose

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MBR-ROBY-CORR, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre). Emphasis added.

Although two New Zealand gymnasts, Rowena Davis and Christine Douglas, reached the qualifying benchmark for the 1980 Games, New Zealand Gymnastics decided to join the boycott.

Riordan, 'Great Britain and the 1980 Olympics,’ 148, 152, 155. Indeed, the British delegation of 326 people was the fourth largest at the Moscow Games.

many of their actions. They should be careful regarding the Congresses to be held at the time of the Games.478

Although Carter eventually agreed to permit officials (judges and committee members) to attend the Games and their corresponding IF congresses, many did not. In the letters to the IOC from July, there are many instances of American officials declining to come to Moscow (for example, Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee representatives and IOC medical commission members), and in turn, the IOC insisting US representatives attend or be removed from their posts.479 As Killanin had feared: ‘by their action, Americans were playing into the hands of the East.’480 There was widespread dismay at the resulting vacuum which enabled the Eastern bloc to seize greater power within sports administration. Károlyi would later comment on this blunder:

You Americans are so far behind in sports politics. The Americans go to world championships or congresses and, quick, want to go home. The officials from the Eastern countries go to all the parties, mix together, make friends. So when it is time to vote, they know where they can find help.481

Adding weight to Karolyi’s claims, the journalist, Neil Amdur, also observed that no Americans served on the IOC Executive Committee after the 1980 Congress, while the leadership shifts in swimming had resulted in the Eastern bloc moving to block

479 Correspondence of the NOC of the USA July to December 1980- SD1 July - September: D-RM01-ETATU/014, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
the number of medals that could be won in swimming – an American stronghold.\textsuperscript{482}

The Roll Call of the 1980 IOC Congress in Moscow, revealed no apologies from boycotting nations’ members, and the members from Australia, the USA, Canada and New Zealand appear to have attended.\textsuperscript{483} Within WAG, only the Canadian WTC member was noted as absent, having being refused permission to travel from her government.\textsuperscript{484} At the FIG General Assembly, there were no such notable absences. However the minutes from that meeting also show that no American or Australian ran for election to the Executive Committee.\textsuperscript{485}

\textit{Perspectives on the Boycott in the International Gymnastics Community}

Although in hindsight there is always disappointment reflecting on the wasted dreams of the young athletes, the sentiment at the time was slightly different. One of few gymnasts whose views were explored in the American media at the time was Kurt Thomas, All-Around runner up at the 1979 World Championships and the best American hope for an Olympic gymnastic medal since the interwar period. His views reveal the conflicting desires of the athlete, who had worked a lifetime for this opportunity, and the patriot.

\textsuperscript{482} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{485} 'F.I.G. Assembly General Held at the State University in Moscow on 16th and 17th July 1980,' in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 106, (September 1980): 76-77.
At first I didn’t agree with the boycott, but now I do. Once I saw the American public was supporting the boycott, I changed my mind. At the Olympics you’re competing for your country, and the way your country feels is the way you should feel … I can’t see going to the Olympics if it defeats what the President is trying to do. We have to do something or the Russians will take over the world.\footnote{Amdur, 'Influence of United States on Olympics Is Slipping.'}

But Thomas may have overestimated his compatriots’ patriotism. As the 1980 boycott became an increasingly real threat, the pages of *International Gymnast* magazine, an American publication with worldwide contributors, turned from meet reports to political editorials on the boycott. Within American gymnastics, there was more opposition to the boycott than Thomas had imagined.

Contributor Kenneth Hovermale highlighted Carter’s inconsistency in ignoring such events as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when declaring Soviet involvement in Afghanistan ‘the greatest threat to world peace since World War II.’\footnote{Kenneth Hovermale, 'An Open Letter to the United States Gymnastics Federation in Response to the Proposed Olympic Boycott,' *International Gymnast*, June 1980.} Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in no way justified ‘the declaration of an international crisis and its attendant Olympic boycott’.\footnote{Ibid.} Pointing to Carter’s low approval rating, he argued the boycott was a political endeavour to win public approval following the Iranian Hostage Crisis of 1979. Similarly, regular gymnastics columnist Dick Criley viewed the United States government’s action as inconsistent with previous foreign policy. No such sanctions were suggested when the Soviets became involved in Afghanistan in 1978, nor had total trade, travel or diplomatic embargoes been enforced in the wake of events there at the end of 1979. ‘Political tensions will always exist,’ wrote another reader. ‘This is not a reason to boycott the...
Olympics; this is why they exist!" A popular refrain was that gymnastics, in particular, had created a sense of unity between East and West, even during Cold War tensions. ‘For short moments at a time the world’s problems were put on hold,’ mused Laura Hendrikson, ‘As we watched Romania’s Nadia Comaneci exhibit talent in skill... We grieved for Olga Korbut who, at times appears old and weary at the age of 21... We respected the athletes. Not their political tendencies.’ In short, the gymnastics community saw the boycott largely as political manoeuvring rather than peacekeeping and, for the most part, called for its rejection.

After the Olympics, however, greater support for the boycott emerged, justification for a deed already done, much of it rooted in an overestimation of America’s medal chances. While expressing sympathy for the athletes who had worked tirelessly for years only to miss their chance in 1980, International Gymnast magazine readers began to argue that a boycott had been the only way to fight aggression in Soviet foreign policy and challenge their ‘propaganda machine’. Long time gymnastics reporter John Crumlish contended: ‘To compete at Moscow would seem as if we know what’s happening in Afghanistan and don’t care, or that we do care but we value Olympic medals more.’ Meanwhile readers such as Lloyd Erikson believed the boycott had at last made an impact on Politburo thinking: ‘Our Olympians … are putting a “spoke” into the mighty Soviet way of doing things… by denying them this propaganda victory.

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489 Laura Hendrikson, 'More Comments on the Boycott,' International Gymnast, August 1980.
490 Ibid.
Reflections on the boycott thirty years later reveal little support for it and more pity for the athletes. ‘The 1980 boycott is still for me one of the worst memories of all time,’ reflected Fink, who coached MAG gymnasts preparing for the competition. ‘…That state of preparation, that state of health can never be brought back. People that lost financial resources come back, but never your state of preparation. So that’s an opportunity gone forever.’

The 1984 Non-Attendance

Four years later, on the 9th of May 1984, the Soviet Union announced its intention not to compete at the LA Olympics, citing fears for its athletes’ welfare, amid ‘anti-Soviet hysteria’, making it impossible to send a team. It claimed that, unlike the USA in 1980, it did not engage in politically motivated actions. ‘We have no intention of boycotting,’ said a statement by Soviet authorities. ‘We make a difference between boycotting and not attending.’

Guttmann suggested the threats to Soviet safety in which the Soviet absence was grounded were in fact negligible: anti-Soviet demonstrations had drawn fewer than 100 people. He thus concluded that the Soviet non-attendance was an example of ‘tit for tat’ policy. However, other scholars argue that the revenge argument does not adequately explain the Soviet absence from the Games. When Robert Edelman revisited the 1984 boycott using newly uncovered Soviet evidence, he found that despite the small size of the group, Soviet leadership was deeply

493 Hardy Fink, 2014.
496 Ibid.
troubled by the protesters and the US government’s failure to silence them. As Edelman quipped: ‘…The Soviets’ understanding of US politics was so distorted that they could not comprehend why the US government could not simply throw a group of ardent anti-Communist protesters into prison for the duration of the Games’.  

Indeed, IOC archives also echo the USSR’s fears regarding security at the Games months before its announcement. In a meeting with US Secretary of State George Schultz shortly after the USSR’s announcement, Samaranch ‘stated that everybody in the Olympic Movement was very worried concerning the security for the Games to be held in Los Angeles in a few days. Following the decision taken by the USSR, various other countries were forced to do likewise’. When Schultz attempted to placate these concerns, explaining that security was shared between local and state authorities, Samaranch reminded him that this was exactly the flaw in security that had led to the events at Munich some years earlier.

In addition, Soviet non-attendance was also rooted in Olympic rhetoric. The communications between the Soviet NOC and the IOC are replete with references to

498 Edelman, 'The Russians Are Not Coming! The Soviet Withdrawal from the Games of the Xxiii Olympiad,' 11.
499 'Meeting of Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch - President of the International Olympic Committee with Mr George Schultz, Secretary of State, Washington,' Summary of Meeting, 28 June 1984, in Correspondence of the NOC of the USA: June to December 1984, SD1- June-July 1981: D-RM01-ETATU/022, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
500 'Meeting of Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch - President of the International Olympic Committee with Mr George Schultz, Secretary of State, Washington,' Summary of Meeting, 28 June 1984.
the LAOOC not being in line with the ‘Olympic charter.’ For instance a letter from May 1984 notes: ‘In December 1983 we nominated our Olympic attaché and the LAOOC agreed. On the eve of his departure he was denied a visa.’ Considering the Soviet athletes would all also require a visa to attend the Games, this was a serious logistical concern, and one which should have been taken care of by the LAOOC, according to the Olympic Charter. In the Soviet view, such problems had been unresolved for the preceding three years, and there is evidence of these concerns being raised in correspondence with the IOC since 1981. Such sources add weight to Edelman’s view that the Soviet Union genuinely was concerned about security.

When Samaranch met with Reagan, the US President assured him of the security of the Games, and of Soviet entry to the US. Samaranch also endeavoured to meet with the new Soviet General Secretary, Chernenko, but was refused. A file marked ‘confidential’ shows that instead he met with the Director of the Legal

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501 Correspondence of the NOC of the USSR 1984: SD2- May 1984: D-RM01-RUSSI/009 (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

502 'Meeting between the President and the Director of the I.O.C. And the I.O.C. Members in the U.S.S.R., Messrs Constantin Andrianov and Vitaly Smirnov, Lausanne, 17th May 1984,' Transcription, 17 May 1984, in Correspondence of the NOC of the USSR 1984: SD2- May 1984: D-RM01-RUSSI/009, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).


504 'Meeting between the President and the Director of the I.O.C. And the I.O.C. Members in the U.S.S.R., Messrs Constantin Andrianov and Vitaly Smirnov, Lausanne, 17th May 1984,' Transcription, 17 May 1984.
Department of the UN in Geneva, Dimitri Kolesnik, who was adamant that ‘the
decision not to participate in the Games was irrevocable’.505 Some weeks later,
Samaranch, along with other Olympic leaders, was able to meet with Talizin, the
Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR. There, he attempted to explain that the 1980
boycott was the work of President Carter and that the IOC, including its US
members had unanimously voted against it (and the suggestions to remove the
Games from Moscow).506

Samaranch evidently believed that the real reason for the Soviet
announcement was revenge policy. His attitude demonstrates increasing political
IOC intervention under his leadership. His activism also highlights another probable
reason for the Soviet boycott: the change in Soviet leadership. Guttmann, influenced
by a suggestion from LA organizing committee member Paul Ziffren, saw that
change as the catalysing factor. Earlier in 1984, Soviet Olympic officials Konstantin
Andrianov and Vitaly Smirnov had indicated they were happy with the work of the
LA organizing committee. But when Yuri Andropov died soon afterwards, and was
replaced as Soviet leader by Konstantin Chernenko, the Soviet attitude to the LA
Games was transformed into one of revenge.507

The IOC archives, however, reveal that Soviet concern about the
organization of the LA Games began before the leadership change, suggesting that
Guttmann has weighed its influence too heavily. By contrast, Edelman's more recent
analysis sees leadership change as important but insufficient explanation of the

505 'Resume of the Meeting Held between the I.O.C. And a Soviet Delegation,' Minutes, 14
May 1984.
506 'Minutes of a Meeting at the Kremlin, Moscow, 31st May 1984,' Minutes, 31 May 1984,
in Correspondence of the NOC of the USSR 1984: SD2- May 1984: D-RM01-
RUSSI/009, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
revenge argument: sport was not a high enough priority for the Party. Without Andropov's advocacy, indifference was a crucial factor in the Soviet Olympic boycott.\textsuperscript{508}

Interestingly, gymnastics was the site of a test-run of this boycott, for all the reasons described above. Precisely one month after Chernenko took office, on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of March 1984, Soviet and East German gymnasts withdrew from the prestigious American Cup competition – an international invitational competition which would later become part of the World Cup circuit.\textsuperscript{509} In a last minute telegram to the USGF, the Soviet Union announced: ‘Due to the intensification of anti-Soviet campaign jeopardizing security of Soviet sportsmen in USA, regret we have to decline participation in American Cup’.\textsuperscript{510} East Germany apparently stayed home due to ‘illness of their athletes’.\textsuperscript{511} Both countries were supposed to compete in the weekend, and they sent this message only on the Monday of that week. The timing and reasoning of this nonattendance bear striking similarity to what would happen months later at the LA Olympics.

By the time of the Games in late July, the USSR and sixteen of its allies had declared their intention not to participate, ironically counting Afghanistan amongst them. The absence of many world-class Eastern athletes enabled the West to dominate the medal tally: importantly, in subjective sports like WAG it provided the

\textsuperscript{508} Edelman, 'The Russians Are \textit{Not} Coming! The Soviet Withdrawal from the Games of the Xxiii Olympiad,' 12.

\textsuperscript{509} Since its inception in 1976, the American Cup has been a competition that showcased future Olympic champions such as Nadia Comaneci. the FIG did not add it to the World Cup Series until it redesigned the programme in 2011.

\textsuperscript{510} ‘Gymnasts 3-13 Sports,’ Telex, 13 March 1984, in \textit{Correspondence of the NOC of the USA: January to May 1984, SD1- January to March 1984}; D-RM01-ETATU/021, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

\textsuperscript{511} ‘Gymnasts 3-13 Sports,’ Telex, 13 March 1984.
opportunity to break into the ranks of elite gymnastics – this will be discussed in further detail shortly.

Refusing to join its Warsaw Pact comrades, Romania was the sole Eastern bloc nation to compete. This rebellious move was reflective of growing tensions within the Eastern bloc from countries resenting being controlled from Moscow.\textsuperscript{512} Mikhail Prozumenshchikov has shown how soccer and hockey offered an ‘acceptable arena for expressing popular hostility toward the Soviet Union in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland,’ and in doing so, how sport reflected Eastern Europe’s political crises.\textsuperscript{513} Romania’s stubborn refusal to boycott in 1984 also reflects the political disunion brewing in the Eastern bloc. According to the Soviet NOC President, part of the reason they were able to do this was because the Soviet Union was not attempting a ‘boycott’, and the accompanying influence of allies’ NOCs.\textsuperscript{514} Romania passive-aggressively attempted to assert its independence from the Soviet Union through the Olympic movement, an unsurprising choice given gymnastics’ standing as the pre-eminent cultural expression of Romanian nationhood, for which the quadrennial Olympics offered the most internationally visible expression.\textsuperscript{515}

\textsuperscript{512} Wilson, 'The Golden Opportunity: Romania's Political Manipulation of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.'

\textsuperscript{513} Mikhail Iu Prozumenshchikov, 'Sports as a Mirror of Eastern Europe's Crises,' \textit{Russian Studies in History}, 49, no. 2 (2010).

\textsuperscript{514} 'Confidential: Meeting of 30th May 1984 at Moscow,' Minutes, 30 May 1984, in \textit{Correspondence of the NOC of the USSR 1984: SD2- May 1984: D-RM01-RUSSI/009}, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

\textsuperscript{515} Wood, 'Superpower: Romanian Women's Gymnastics During The Cold War.'
Responses to the Boycotts:

The International Gymnastics Federation

In keeping with the IOC’s insistence that sport and politics were two quite separate spheres, correspondence between the IOC and the FIG contained few references to the 1980 boycott. Similarly, the FIG seldom mentioned the Moscow boycott in any of their eight Bulletins between 1980 and 1981. As the 1980 Presidential Report showed, its sole concern was the advancement of gymnastics through increasing international participation.516

The Report of the WTC, though, did mention the boycott in a report on the standard of gymnastics in 1980, though it did so without expressing concern. ‘Although the gymnasts of some countries were unable to participate because of the decision to boycott the Games taken by their governments,’ wrote chairwoman Ellen Berger, ‘the gymnastics competitions were characterized by a high standard of performance and were representative of the international level of women’s gymnastics.’517 The WTC was more concerned after the 1984 Games, noting the Eastern bloc’s absence had a negative effect on the quality of gymnastics.518 Despite coming from a boycotting nation himself, President Titov remained as unmoved by the 1984 boycott as he had been four years earlier. In his annual report for 1984, his only allusion to the boycott was a few words about: ‘all the difficulties encountered

within the Olympic movement and world sport in general’. In keeping with past IOC and FIG aversion to politics, Titov added: ‘it is hardly within our power to change the structures of world sport and we must, perforce, live with our times, advancing with the existing ideas and problems’. Re-electing him in 1984, the gymnastics community gave its approval to such policies.

The International Olympic Committee

While the IOC reprimanded the US for its failure to attend the 1980 Games, it spent little time dwelling on the Moscow Olympics. Invoking one of the best examples of the IOC’s political clout, Killanin initiated a meeting between Carter and Brezhnev to where he would act as mediator. After 1980, the IOC presidency passed from Killanin to Samaranch, who used his political experience as Spanish ambassador to Moscow to negotiate on behalf of the Olympic movement, although he met much the same walls from politicians. So, the IOC was put in a position where it had to take its own action. Although some members raised the idea of sanctioning non-attending NOCs, the feeling of the IOC Session was that this would not be desirable, only serving to exacerbate the problem of such countries not being present. Samaranch

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520 Ibid.
521 Ibid.
522 Lord Michael Killanin (IOC President), Telex to President Jimmy Carter and President Leonid Brezhnev, 23 April 1980, in Correspondence of the NOC of the USA January to June 1980- SD3 April-June: D-RM01-ETATU/013, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
523 'Minutes of the 89th I.O.C. Session: Lausanne, 1st and 2nd December 1984,' Minutes to Members of the IOC, 1984, in IOC Archives- sessions and executive committee: CIO SESS-089ES-PV, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
remarked: ‘It was easy to say that there were no politics in sport, but politics influenced all areas of society. It was hoped that détente would reign between the major powers in 1988.’ By 1984, the organization recoiled from being used as a political tool and, under the new leadership of Samaranch, began to utilize its high profile status to intervene in international politics.

Between the 19th and 21st of November, Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan met for the first time in Geneva to discuss Soviet-US relations. The IOC took a deep interest in this, with President Samaranch writing to the latter before the talks:

> On behalf of all the members of the IOC, International Sports Federations and National Olympic Committees, as well as the hundreds of millions of people throughout the world which share the Olympic ideals of brotherhood, mutual understanding and respect, friendship and peace, I would like to express to both of you the most ardent and sincere wishes for success.

Indeed, preceding the Geneva summit where the ‘Joint Statement’ between the two nations was agreed, a similar meeting between the two National Olympic Committees in Indianapolis entrusted the IOC to oversee the development of cultural

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524 'Minutes of the 89th I.O.C. Session: Lausanne, 1st and 2nd December 1984,' Minutes to Members of the IOC, 1984.


As a result of the boycotts and IOC-led diplomacy, the Soviet Union and the USA agreed to work together on a range of mutual endeavours.

The IOC justified its entry into Cold War diplomacy: ‘The Olympic movement fosters, and is intended to foster, goodwill, mutual understanding among nations and youth of this world’. The two National Olympic Committees agreed with the IOC that they would encourage their national sports federations to expand exchanges through bilateral and multilateral competitions and joint training camps. This cooperation was also ‘to extend to the exchange of coaches, officials, referees, researchers and other sport experts and their participation, upon invitation of the host country, in seminars, clinics and meetings of common interest.’ Both NOCs agreed to work together to raise the standard of elite sport through exchanging information regarding ‘structures, programming and activities,’ as well as ‘team selection criteria, management, and sport event organization.’ A protocol following the meeting gave specific instances of exchange. Soviet swimming,

527 Robert Helmick (USOC) and Marat Gramaov (USSR NOC), 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between United States Olympic Committee and National Olympic Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,' 15 September 1985, in Agreement signed by the NOC of USA 1979-1988, SD2- Contracts 1985-1988: D-RM01-ETATU/031, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

528 Robert Helmick (USOC) and Marat Gramaov (USSR NOC), 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between United States Olympic Committee and National Olympic Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,' 15 September 1985.


530 Ibid.
synchronized swimming, and track and field experts would be sent to the US to share their knowledge, while the USSR would receive track and field as well as synchronized swimming advice from US coaches.531 This agreement did not mention gymnastics, although Soviet-Australian relations in gymnastics blossomed in the years following, with a series of competitions and tours, including the sending two of Australia’s best coaches to the Soviet Union to observe and learn from their gymnastics.532

The Goodwill Games

It was in this atmosphere that the Goodwill Games arose. Although a rival competition to the Olympic Games, they also aligned with fundamental tenets of Olympism – fostering friendship and world peace through sport. Reflecting the late 1980s Cold War denouement, the Goodwill Games sprang into being as a symbol of cooperation between East and West, following the agreements outlined above. Although spearheaded by a private individual, American media mogul Ted Turner, IOC archives show that NOCs were involved. Agreements were made between Turner, representing his company, Turner Broadcasting, and the Soviet government agencies: the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and the USSR State Committee for Television and Radio.533 In their

531 Ibid.

532 Liz Chetkovich and Warwick Forbes both went to the Soviet Union in the late 1980s to learn from the coaches there. Meanwhile Soviet teams were hosted in Australia throughout the decade.

protocol of intent, the Goodwill Games’ purpose was stated: ‘to promote strengthening of cooperation and mutual understanding among the countries.’ It is interesting that such files appear in the IOC archives, despite the newcomer’s position as a clear competitor to the Olympic Games. Encompassing much the same line-up in terms of sports and athletes, the Goodwill Games were certainly competition to the Olympic Games, yet their purpose must have been music to the Olympic movement’s idealistic ears. Here was rhetoric of mutual cooperation, even peace through sport – two of the very principles around which Olympism is based. Indeed, Samaranch cooed this mantra to the press when questioned about the Goodwill Games: ‘Without doubt, the competitions held in the Soviet capital open a new chapter in the development of sport. It is conducive to friendship, mutual understanding and the ideals of the international Olympic movement as a whole.’

In this light, it is not surprising the Goodwill Games earned some support from the IOC. But despite such records appearing in the IOC archives, it appears the organization was not approached for permission or endorsement of the Games. After overseeing the signing of the agreement of mutual cooperation between the USA and USSR, the Goodwill Games were organized without the IOC’s official knowledge; however, USOC President Helmick was feeding this information to the IOC. Samaranch bristled:

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Games a Moscow (USSR) in 1986: SD4- Protocol of Intention: H-FC040GOODW/001, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).


The position of the IOC regarding the Goodwill Games is very special because we don’t know a single word officially. Nothing. Not a telex, not a letter, not an invitation. Nothing. Nothing. We know what is going on only because you report to me privately and so we have read many things in the papers, radio and television. You know that, in principle, we the IOC, have nothing against sports organizations, sport events. But, we are surprised with this kind of thing. We are surprised that one side of the Games are managed by the Soviet Olympic Committee and the other side, the USOC.\(^536\)

Nonetheless, the Games were organized as a result of the 1980 and 1984 boycotts, and continued quadrennially in the middle of Olympic cycles until 2001. While not under the leadership of the IOC, its participating nations (including most of the largest Olympic players) were organized by their NOCs. If the IOC wanted to be a world mediator and sport a tool for world peace, then it had learned to lead by example with its handling of the Goodwill Games.

**WAG at the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games**

Returning to WAG, the boycotts of the 1980s had a profound effect on a sport where impressions were everything. However, as indicated by the FIG reactions, the effect on the 1980 Games was less notable. With the absence of several Western nations at the 1980 Olympics, the Soviet Union unsurprisingly renewed its domination of WAG, which had been challenged by Comaneci’s All-Around title in 1976. Elena Davydova won the All-Around for the Soviet Union, which also won the team event; Elena Shaposhnikova claimed the gold on vault and Kim shared the gold with

\(^{536}\) Robert Helmick, Dick Pound, and Juan Antonio Samaranch, Transcript of Mr Robert Helmick's Remarks at the Executive Board Meeting on 6th December 1985 in Lausanne,’ 1985, in *1st edition of the Goodwill Games a Moscow (USSR) in 1986: SD5- Transcription of the discussions concerning the Goodwill Games of the Executive Committee*: H-FC040GOODW/001, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
Comaneci on floor. There was a wider range of countries on the medal podium for the individual apparatus although most were still Eastern European. While Comaneci successfully defended her beam title from 1976, Maxi Gnauck of the German Democratic Republic won the uneven bars. But unlike a decade earlier, there was no breakout star – perhaps reflecting the significance of the Western absence in how WAG was broadcast and consumed. It was also significant that Korbut had left the limelight, and while the public still loved Comaneci, success for her was now no surprise. Rather, as discussed in the previous chapter, the public was disappointed to see Comaneci was no longer a little girl. International Gymnast columnist Richard Taffe Junior summed up: ‘World media… used the gymnastics competition in Moscow to symbolize what it wanted most to show. For the East, it was the overwhelming triumph of the Soviet system. For the West, Nadia’s internal conflicts were seen in the end as a vicarious victory over the obsessive dominance of the Russian hosts.’

The absence of American gymnasts made little impact on WAG in Moscow, despite some who claim that the US might have medalled at those Games. Notwithstanding improvements over the following three years, American gymnasts failed to win a single medal in MAG or WAG at the 1983 World Championships. The highest placed American in the All-Around was Kathy Johnston in 11th. While she and compatriot Julianne McNamara reached several apparatus finals, neither made it higher than 6th place. But in 1984, the absence of the Soviet Union and

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East Germany meant that many of the world’s top ranked gymnasts missed the Olympics – the first of many stars to align in changing US gymnastics’ fate.

This set the scene perfectly for five foot Houston teenager Mary Lou Retton to explode into gymnastics celebrity in America. In a competition that could not have been better scripted for television, the energetic sixteen year old needed a 10 on her final event to claim the gold over Romania’s Ekaterina Szabo. The competition came down to Retton’s final performance and Retton rose to the occasion, receiving her second perfect score of the day and clinching the victory over Szabo. Retton became the first non-Eastern European to win the Olympic All-Around title. The US women’s team also claimed their first Olympic medal since 1948, coming second to Romania. Despite most of the Eastern bloc’s absence, outperforming Romania was no mean feat. Retton, who won silver on vault and bronze on floor as well, was named Sport’s Illustrated’s Sportswoman of the Year and made several lucrative advertising deals discussed later in this chapter. The American victory in Los Angeles was not Retton’s alone; teammate Julianne McNamara tied for gold on uneven bars and won silver on floor, with Kathy Johnson claiming the bronze on beam. It was a veritable success across the board for American WAG.

It was also at these Olympics that the force of Chinese gymnastics was first demonstrated to the world. 1984 saw China’s re-entry into the Olympics after being excluded in the dispute between Nationalist Taiwan and the Communist People’s Republic over representation as ‘China’. IOC recognition of ‘Chinese Taipei’ as a separate national Olympic Committee in 1979 allowed mainland China to seek independent entry in the early 1980s. Given its strained relations with the Soviet Union, China was keen not to boycott the 1984 Games, and made a very successful

debut in Los Angeles. The men’s gymnastics team claimed the silver along with several individual gold medals on the apparatus. The women’s team came third, with Ma Yanhong tying for the gold on the uneven bars. But despite the success of the new Chinese gymnasts and the improvements by Americans, even the FIG had to note in its report on the Olympics that ‘with regard to the standard of performance, the absence of the USSR, GDR, Bulgaria, Hungary and the CSSR was very noticeable.’

The success of the United States gymnasts at these Olympics was perhaps due to more than simply the absence of the Eastern bloc. ‘By then America was going to win medals anyway,’ observed Hardy Fink. ‘They wouldn’t have won them all but they would have won some.’ Indeed, the other significant factor contributing to their success was the use of Eastern bloc methods to achieve their goals, something Australia was also beginning to do. Romanian defectors Marta and Bela Károlyi, former coaches of Comaneci, were instrumental in getting America to the top of the Olympic gymnastics table: two of their gymnasts, Retton and McNamara, were responsible for the lion’s share of American medals in 1984.

**Conclusion**

Clearly the 1984 boycott was beneficial for American gymnastics, while the one that preceded it had received surprisingly mixed support from athletes. In the wider Western community, although political leaders were willing to endorse the boycott, the people and their NOCs were less keen. So while the boycotts of 1980 and 1984

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541 Connie Lauerman, 'Julianne McNamara: To Overcome the Letdown I Set New Goals after the Olympics,' *Chicago Tribune*, 14 December 1986.
can be interpreted as political blundering at best, and tragedy for athletes at worst, they were a real test for the Olympic movement. No longer ignoring its political power, the IOC refused to be bullied by the American threat of boycott. Starting with Killanin and increasing under Samaranch, the IOC took a greater role in international relations; from supervising cooperation through sport, to supporting the invention of the Goodwill Games. In doing so the Olympic movement solidified its long held rhetoric of the Games’ importance in facilitating world peace. But as the decade progressed, WAG remained contested territory.
Chapter Six

An Art of Flight: WAG Under Globalization and Professionalization

The USA’s success in WAG in 1984 continued throughout the remainder of the decade. Australia, too, rose rapidly through the gymnastics ranks. And although the absence of the Eastern bloc in 1984 certainly facilitated these improvements, other factors were reshaping the gymnastic fortunes of such Western countries. Gymnastics was experiencing the effect of a new wave of globalization, spurred on by the beginnings of an exodus of coaching experts. At the same time, the approach to gymnastics changed in these destinations as they began to employ a more professional system across a variety of sports. These factors did not simply change WAG in Australia and the US: they also changed the face of the sport internationally.

This chapter relies on a melange of the sources mentioned so far in this thesis, but primarily draws on FIG Bulletins and Olympic Archives. It begins with an examination of how Eastern bloc forces came to influence WAG (and other sports) in the US and Australia. There is much more emphasis on the development of Australian gymnastics due to an abundance of sources. Next, these changes are contextualized in the increasingly professionalizing world of Olympic sport – an issue on which the IOC and its federations, including the FIG, did not see eye to eye. Finally, it takes an inward turn, examining the developments of WAG itself as a result of these and other influences.
The Globalization of Gymnastics

US Gymnastics and the Károlyis

After Comaneci’s success in Montreal, she and her coaches, the Károlyis, were closely watched by the Romanian government, who wanted to use them as political tools to enhance the image of the communist regime. The President of the Romanian Gymnastics Federation, Nicolai Vieru, made it clear the Károlyis were suspected of preparing to defect. Comaneci and her teammates were transferred to another gym and the Károlyis’ funding cut. ‘All of a sudden they forget everything I do,’ recalled Károlyi. ‘I am “controversial.”’ So at the end of a tour of America in 1981, the Károlyis and their colleague, Geza Pozsar, checked the team in for their flight home, then slipped out of the airport, unbeknownst to their gymnasts, including Comaneci. After the flight departed they sought political asylum.

Living in the US, they encountered typical scepticism and distrust of Eastern bloc coaches until Paul Ziert, a gymnastics coach at the University of Oklahoma, approached them with an offer of work at his gym. A year later, the Károlyis settled in Houston and started their own club. Advertising on lamp posts around the community, they at first attracted only 24 students. But as it became known exactly who they were, the number increased until they had a school of 500 girls only 18 months later, including the next Olympic champion.

Employing the same scheming publicity applied to Comaneci’s debut in 1976, the Károlyis made sure that Retton was well known on the international circuit

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543 Bela Károlyi in ibid.

544 Ibid.
before the 1984 Games. At a time when there was as little as 0.05 points between the few top gymnasts, reputation was all-important. When assessing movements sometimes too fast to process, it was not unusual to judge what was expected of the gymnast, rather than what she actually did. Starting to compete internationally to increase her exposure, in 1983 Retton claimed the All-Around title at the prestigious Chunichi Cup in Japan,\(^5\)\(^4\) defeating several Eastern Europeans including Maxi Gnauck of German Democratic Republic and Elena Shoushounova of the USSR. This international success foreshadowed her Olympic achievement a year later.

Retton’s victory in 1984 broke the barrier to international success for American gymnasts. While a handful of American gymnasts had won apparatus medals at the world championships before this, clinching an Olympic medal – the gold, no less – proved its past successes were no fluke. Her victory provided the international reputation necessary for American gymnastics to be taken seriously thereafter. While the artistic style defined and driven by Soviet gymnasts continued to dominate, Retton’s success exemplified the powerful, albeit marginalized, style of gymnastics beginning to emerge internationally. Although competitors such as Elena Shushunova (USSR) had demonstrated such powerful (dynamic and acrobatic) gymnastics too, it was not typical of Eastern bloc gymnastics, nor was it as notable in the presence of strong dance training that mitigated it. America’s medal-winning efforts using power gymnastics, however, gave the nation influence in the new direction of gymnastics. But within the US, media reports casting a shadow over the Károlyis success perpetuated mistrust over Eastern bloc methods.

Don’t be fooled by those smiling, romping little girls… Women’s gymnastics is a sport so factionalized, so fraught with infighting and blood feuds that it could make Don King and Bob Arum blush.546

As Richard O’Brien observed in *Sports Illustrated*, growing recognition of the Károlyi’s talent brought resentment from other coaches whom they overshadowed. The same reporter asserted that American coaches saw Bela ‘as a kind of Coach Dracula, menacing the red-blooded American system’.547 Bela met with particular resistance from Don Peters, one of the top coaches in America until the Károlyis’ arrival, whose protégés included 1984 Olympic bronze medallist on beam, Kathy Johnson. As Head Coach for several American gymnastics tours, Peters perhaps had the most to lose from the arrival of the Károlyis. The rivalry came to a head in 1988. Peters was named US Olympic team coach, despite four Károlyi gymnasts in the team when none of Peters’ were selected. Peters had no choice but to resign his position, after which Károlyi was installed as coach.548 Thereafter, USGF changed its policy to allow every athlete in the national team to have her coach present.

Some criticism of Károlyi no doubt came from his overbearing presence, seen as symptomatic of an oppressive Eastern Bloc system too tough on its athletes. ‘Talk to some national-level coaches and you will hear Károlyi accused of everything from raging egotism to intimidation of judges to violation of the child-labour laws,’ claimed O’Brien. ‘His peers paint a picture of Károlyi as a ruthless Svengali, overworking his innocent young gymnasts for his own megalomaniacal

546 O’Brien, ‘Gymnastics Lord Gym,’ 27 July 1992. Don King and Bob Arum were two American boxing promoters who famously feuded over several decades.

547 Ibid.

548 Ibid. Although it is not relevant to the case here, Peters was later barred from the USGF following allegations of child molestation.
needs. Indeed, an FIG expert similarly claimed that Americans knew what was necessary to create the best gymnasts in the world; however it was only Eastern bloc coaches who were prepared to push the gymnasts that far.

Despite the criticisms, the Károlyis had a profound effect on re-shaping WAG in America, and their methods were proved with the American success of the 1980s and 1990s. However, as interviews with the Károlyis or their gymnasts were declined for this research, it is difficult to speculate what exactly these methods involved. In 1992, Mike Jacki, executive director of the USGF, commented: ‘The one thing over the past 10 years that's had the most effect on U.S. gymnastics, overwhelmingly, is the presence of Bela Károlyi.’ O’Brien concluded: ‘Despite the complaints of many in the U.S. gymnastics community, Károlyi has successfully brought his system to America.’ It must be acknowledged here that Bela, with all his expertise in image craft was the public face of the Károlyi effort. However, in the long term is has since emerged that it was his wife, Martha who proved to be the driving force and gymnastics genius.

The USA had won their first world championship medal with Cathy Rigby in the early 1970s. Although emerging gymnasts such as Marcia Frederick had perhaps missed their opportunity for glory when the US boycotted the 1980 Olympics, they were beginning to break into the top level of gymnastics before the Károlyis arrived. What the Károlyis did was channel that potential, through a combination of improving public relations for American gymnastics, together with tougher

549 Ibid.
550 Ibid.
551 Ibid.
552 Martha Károlyi has led the American team since 2001 through its most successful period ever.
psychological training, and generally taking a more systematic approach to developing elite gymnasts. ‘When Marta and Bela Károlyi came over and they basically grabbed Mary Lou with a year to go, and then made that transformation,’ observed Australian national programme manager Liz Chetkovich. ‘Then other people started to follow. Then the real education started in American circles.’

Similarly, Hardy Fink noted:

He didn’t do all that preparation for Mary Lou Retton, or [Kim] Zmeskal or anyone. But suddenly he arrives in town, they all go to him and they’re champions. They would have been champions without him, but he did do that final bit of psychological touch up, whatever you want to call it. I’m not sure what it was, but it put them over the top; that last little bit that they needed.

While American gymnastics was undergoing changes thanks to the Károlyis, Australian gymnastics was also benefiting from another Eastern immigrant. Moreover, an abundance of sources pointing to the re-organization of the Australian sport system from the top down enables a more detailed and nuanced assessment of the changing landscape for Australian WAG.

**Australian Gymnastics and the Australian Institute of Sport**

In 1981, the Australian Institute of Sport opened as a national elite training centre, with gymnastics one of eight selected sports. The impact of the AIS on WAG in Australia was extraordinary. However, its very inclusion in Australia’s new sporting drive came somewhat out of left field. The roots of this new system, and gymnastics inclusion in it, lie in changes in the wider Australia sport system of the 1970s.

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553 Liz Chetkovich, interviewed by Georgia Cervin, (Western Australia), 2014.
554 Hardy Fink, 2014.
It is commonly held that Australia’s lacklustre performance at the Montreal Olympics led to the establishment of the AIS. However, historians have shown that this performance only hastened a process that was already underway: overhauling Australia’s sports system to match international trends, especially in the Eastern bloc. Before the Munich Olympics in 1972 the Whitlam government had commissioned John Bloomfield, head of a relatively new physical education department at the University of Western Australia, to investigate the state of, and make plans for, the future of Australian sport. The 1973 Bloomfield Report examined the successful sports systems of Europe, most of which were formed after World War II and notably included the Eastern bloc’s state sport programmes. By contrast, Australia’s ‘system’ was one for sport at the turn of the century, relying on natural talent and amateurism, with little support for athletes. Bloomfield recommended that to keep pace with contemporary developments in international sport, a permanent centralized sporting structure be established. It would include research and development in sports management, coaching and officiating, provide sports science and medicine services, identify talent, offer scholarships and support overseas travel - all distinct features of the Eastern bloc programmes.\textsuperscript{555} The Bloomfield Report’s underlying philosophy was encapsulated by its recommendation that ‘the existing amateur sport and recreation system be professionalized.’\textsuperscript{556}

Subsequently, the Minister for Tourism and Recreation appointed Dr Allan Coles to lead a study into the feasibility of such an institution. The 1975 Coles Report drew heavily from European sports systems, and recommended a central

\textsuperscript{555} Bloomfield, ‘The Role, Scope and Development of Recreation in Australia.’

\textsuperscript{556} Bloomfield, \textit{Australia's Sporting Success}, 39.
branch and state branches for an Australian Institute of Sport, as well as financial, scientific and organizational support. It was Coles’ view too that to maintain international standards, Australians would ‘need to be able to depend on more than raw talent’. Significantly for this study, gymnastics was featured as a sport in particular need of a more purposeful approach:

[It is] evident that in sports where sophisticated skill and very expert coaching is needed such as gymnastics… we will continue to stagnate until and unless basic changes are implemented in our coaching systems and research, and until proper training facilities are established.

For a number of reasons Coles’ 1975 recommendations were not to be implemented for another six years. Whitlam’s Labor government moved incrementally, first addressing the sub-par facilities in many sports, using $6 million to reach standards comparable to those in Europe and the US. But that government was removed in 1975 before any further steps could be taken. Bloomfield later reflected that the model provided by the Coles Report was ‘pigeon holed by the incoming Fraser government in 1975,’ and the development of Australian sport ‘floundered’ during this period.

Australia’s dismal five medals across all sports at Montreal in 1976 were symptomatic of Australian sport’s lack of systematic funding and organization. In contrast to the Eastern bloc, Australia’s stagnant, laissez faire approach was no longer sufficient to compete with other nations. Historian Brian Stoddart argued: ‘it was not so much that Australian sports fortunes had slumped since 1956, it was just

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558 Ibid., 197.
559 Ibid., 41.
560 Ibid., 43.
that the rest of the world had drawn away. However, this result gave new life to Bloomfield’s and Coles’ findings, and renewed the push to overhaul Australia’s sports system.

Eventually, the advocacy of Bob Ellicott, Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, built on consistent lobbying by athletes, coaches and the public to change government attitudes. After seeing a national training centre on a trip to China, he pushed for government-sponsored sport in Australia, utilizing the model put forward by Coles and left untouched after the change in government. In much the same manner as in the Soviet system, Ellicott privileged elite sports development over grass-roots investment, on a ‘trickle down’ assumption that successful athletes would inspire the masses. Indeed, the formation of the AIS, and gymnastics’ inclusion in it, are often attributed to this one man’s advocacy.

The beginnings of the AIS were vital to the history of gymnastics in Australia, transforming a lowly funded sporting landscape with poor facilities, lack of expertise, and little support. Yet there was no certainty WAG would be included among the eight sports in the AIS program. Throughout the 1980s, the AGF’s quarterly magazine, the *Australian Gymnast*, referred to the sport’s good fortune in having been included in the AIS program. Bloomfield attributed gymnastics’ inclusion to the advocacy of Jim Barry, a ‘powerful sports administrator’ who happened to be the President of the Australian Gymnastics Federation. Meanwhile Barry attributed gymnastics’ inclusion less to his own work and more to the nature

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562 Bloomfield, *Australia’s Sporting Success*, 55.

563 Ibid., 57.
of the sport: ‘Gymnastics is the basis of many sports disciplines and obviously one
of the reasons why we have been included in the initial eight sports to operate in the
institute.’ One of the longest serving coaches at the AIS, Warwick Forbes, also
pointed to the nature of gymnastics as the reason for its inclusion. He argued that the
AIS had tried to include sports with different attributes to form a well-rounded
programme: they had team sports and individual sports, and gymnastics’ role was to
fill the gap between sport and art. This, asserted Forbes, was part of Ellicott’s vision.
Similarly, another coach, Liz Chetkovich, also claimed it was Ellicott’s doing,
mentioning that it was his personal affection for gymnastics that earned it its AIS
berth. Indeed, in 1982, the AGF named him ‘Patron of the AGF,’ in appreciation of
his championing of the sport, noting: ‘It was at his initiative that Gymnastics was
included in the AIS’.565

As early as 1980, the AGF employed a form of talent identification,566 and
from the opening of the AIS in January 1981, scholarships were awarded for WAG
and a purpose built gymnastics facility was created,567 although the emphasis was
originally on MAG.568 In early 1982 funding for another assistant coach brought
Kym Coombes (Dowdell) to join Kazuya Honda, who had been leading the WAG
programme since the AIS opened.569 The following year, performances at the 1983
World Championships in Budapest showed that gymnastics had not yet met

565 'R. J. Ellicott: Patron of the Australian Gymnastic Federation Inc.,' Australian Gymnast,
vol. 10, no. 10, July 1982.
566 Frances Thompson, ‘Women's Technical Report,' Australian Gymnast, vol. 10, no. 4,
December 1980.
567 Frances Thompson, ‘Women's Technical Report,' Australian Gymnast, vol. 10, no. 5,
March 1981.
expectations raised by the AIS program, with the women’s team ranked 23rd out of 28 teams. This lacklustre outcome resulted in the negotiation of new coaching arrangements.570

As AIS Director from 1984, Dr John Cheffers worked with the AGF to fine tune the gymnastics programme towards a semi-centralized model: ‘You just cannot operate at a single elite centre to achieve the goals of gymnastics in Australia,’ wrote Barry.571 The new initiative was to establish centres of excellence eventually in state to be both complementary to the central Institute in Canberra and a ‘feeder system’ to it.572 Former AIS head coach Kazuya Honda relocated to the Victorian institute, in favour of a decentralized system.573 Similarly, Kym Coombes and Liz Chetkovich acted as the satellite coaches in their respective states (Queensland and Western Australia (WA)).574 After the WA Institute of Sport opened in 1984, a scholarship in 1986 enabled Head Coach Liz Chetkovich to learn from Soviet coaches, resulting in the inception of a full-time WAG programme in WA by 1988.575 This was the beginning of the state institutes, but their subordinate design was also the beginning of a power struggle between them and the AIS. Shortly after Cheffers’ arrival, Ju Ping Tian, a recent immigrant from China, was employed as the new WAG Head

572 Ibid.
573 Warwick Forbes, interviewed by Georgia Cervin, (via telephone), 2016.
574 Barry, 'President's Report,' vol. 10, no. 19, October/November 1984.
575 Chetkovich, 2014.
Coach at the AIS in February 1985, and she would soon overhaul the entire national WAG programme.\textsuperscript{576}

By October 1985 the ‘breadth of talent’ in the WAG programme was evident when Australia had nine gymnasts to choose from when selecting the six-member team to the World Championships in Montreal.\textsuperscript{577} Acknowledging its new fortunes thanks to Tian, the AGF wrote in its magazine: ‘consistency combined with neat presentations and tidy basics (i.e. legs together and straight) produced a good result.’\textsuperscript{578} Barry attributed the improvement to Ju Ping Tian’s coaching based on ‘a tremendous workload … with specific concentration on compulsory exercises.’ It was a long held opinion that ‘where you place in the compulsory round is more or less where you will place at the end of the competition, and this was borne out this time.’\textsuperscript{579} Australia’s strategic approach to improving its ranking was beginning to pay off.

By 1988, in the face of budget cuts, the women’s programme managed to retain three coaches and twelve scholarships, while the men stagnated at two coaches and eight scholarships. This was in part a reflection of the numbers of participating gymnasts –approximately WAG 75%, MAG 22%, Rhythmic 7%.\textsuperscript{580} AIS domination of the sport in Australia was seen when the two female gymnasts sent to the 1988 Games were both trained by Tian. While both achieved personal bests, the AGF believed them disadvantaged by lack of team support.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{576} Frances Crampton, 'Women's Technical Report,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 11, no. 1, March/April 1985.

\textsuperscript{577} James Barry, 'President's Report,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 11, no. 3, October 1985.

\textsuperscript{578} Peggy Browne, 'Editorial,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 11, no. 4, December 1985.

\textsuperscript{579} Barry, 'President's Report,' vol. 11, no. 4, December 1985.

\textsuperscript{580} Warwick Forbes, Ju Ping Tian, Mark Calton, Tian Weishun, and John Curtin, 'Australian Institute of Sport: Gymnastics Notes,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 13, no. 3, Spring 1988.}
The only disappointment is the placings of all [Australian] individual gymnasts in the competition when compared to those gymnasts supported within the twelve teams. There is no simple answer to team “creep” – what however is clear, is that for Australia to do well, they must qualify as a team. Naturally this is our objective.\textsuperscript{581}

Australia was on track to meet its goal of qualifying a team to the Olympic Games within the next quadrennium. By 1989, World Championship performances by the AIS’s Monique Allen had secured Australian women an invitation to the World Cup circuit: ‘a major break through for our women’s programme,’\textsuperscript{582} and by the next Olympics, Australia had improved enough to qualify its first team.

These advances were not simply a reflection of updated facilities and greater funding. They were in large part due to the international approach taken by Australian gymnastics leaders, the result of a globalizing influence in WAG. With the assistance of foreign experts like Tian, Australian Gymnastics was able to implement new programmes improving coach education, and take a more strategic approach to improving Australia’s lot in the political circles of gymnastics.

Throughout the 1980s, Australia began to invest in networking in the gymnastics world to improve the country’s knowledge in gymnastics. In 1984 the AGF brought British coach John Atkinson to the AIS to conduct a MAG coaching clinic.\textsuperscript{583} In 1985 AIS MAG Head Coach Warwick Forbes went to America to observe the training, returning with new recommendations emphasising ballet work in developing gymnastics.

\textsuperscript{581} James E. Barry, 'President's Report,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 13, no. 4, Summer 1988.
\textsuperscript{582} James E. Barry, 'President's Report,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 14, no. 4, Summer 1989.
\textsuperscript{583} Ken Williamson, 'Men's Technical Bulletin,' \textit{Australian Gymnast}, vol. 10, no. 13, April 1983.
In Eastern Europe, ballet has been a part of men’s and women’s gymnastics training for many years. The effects can be seen in the large proportion of Olympic medals regularly won by Russian and Rumanian gymnasts. But despite these results, regular ballet training is not generally incorporated into the training of Western male gymnasts. Australia, however, is now an exception.584

As a result of the trip, Forbes invited an American gymnastics dance teacher to work with AIS gymnasts in all disciplines, an important move for a nation whose gymnastics would come to be recognized for classical elegance and clean lines.585

In 1986 Forbes visited the Soviet Union again. Observing the training system at clubs in Moscow, he noted in particular the emphasis on healthcare for athletes as well as the lack of reliance on sports sciences, including biomechanics and sport psychologists. Indeed, Forbes returned to Australia parroting the methods of Soviet national coach, Leonid Arkaev, who had advanced from the days of teams of support staff (in terms of sports scientists, nutritionists, psychologists and the like), instead stressing the importance of the highly trained and specialized coaches who could fulfil all these roles. Coaches had to be graduates of an Institute of Physical Culture, which only accepted candidates who had achieved a Master of Sport in gymnastics (attained by meeting a benchmark score at the highest level of national competition). For four years coaches had gymnastics-specific practical training, relying on biomechanics, physiology, history, sociology and psychology, giving them most relevant knowledge available, with no need to rely on outsiders. When Forbes presented some coaches with copies of AIS Sports Science Quarterly, they ‘scoffed at the biomechanists and psychologists saying that they were not up to date with the

top level of gymnastics’. Forbes returned to Australia recommending reforms to ensure Australian coaches were better educated. As part of this new coach education, he envisioned continued visits from Australian coaches to observe Soviet methods, while encouraging Soviet experts to run clinics in Australia.

In addition to pursuing international friends for improving gymnastics knowledge, Australia also sought to build its political network amongst international gymnastics leaders. First, Australia stepped up its role in hosting world-class gymnastics competitions. In 1985, the nation hosted the inaugural ‘Australia Games’ – another initiative of the Bloomfield Report. Although unfortunately held only once, this twenty-sport festival invited the best athletes from around the world, including over forty international competitors in gymnastics. The calibre of the competitions, boasting a truly top class international field of competitors, made the gymnastic competitions the widely acclaimed highlight of the Games week,’ observed Australian gymnastics commentator Peter Hassan. Gymnasts from the Soviet Union, USA, Japan, China, Canada, Bulgaria, Italy, New Zealand and Germany took part, and the competition was designed for television, maximizing coverage. Such was the standard of competition that it included Natalia Yurchenko, 1983 World Champion. Accordingly, it not only demonstrated Australian gymnastics to the world, but also served as an important test before

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587 Ibid.
589 Ibid.
590 Ibid.
Australian gymnasts competed against the full strength international teams at world championships.\(^\text{591}\)

Following the Australia Games, in 1986 the AGF recruited Westfield Group as a sponsor to host a dual meet between Australian and American gymnasts. In addition to providing Australian gymnasts with international exposure before larger competitions, it also earned the sport some popularity at home. New South Wales hosted the Westfield Gymnastic Spectacular, a ‘magic mix of competition and pure showmanship blended together into an extravaganza never before experienced in Australia.’\(^\text{592}\) Both countries fielded some of their best gymnasts;\(^\text{593}\) the American team including Rhonda Faehn, (future 1988 Olympic team alternate) Kristie Phillips (1987 US National Champion) and Phoebe Mills (1988 Olympic bronze medallist), all competing for team Károlyi.\(^\text{594}\)

In 1987 Soviet gymnasts again toured Australia. Some of their top gymnasts such as Oksana Omelianchik and Olga Mostepanova attended, and there to watch were Australian politicians including Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Federal Minister for Sport John Brown. Although this was more an exhibition than a serious competition, it further strengthened ties between the Soviet Union and Australia, with the AGF noting that ‘the personal friendships that were developed will certainly prove to be of benefit in the development of gymnastics in Australia and in furthering of international relationships with the Soviet Gymnastic Federation.’\(^\text{595}\)

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\(^\text{591}\) Browne, 'Editorial,' vol. 11, no. 1, March/April 1985.

\(^\text{592}\) Peter Hassan, 'Westfield Gymnastic Spectacular,' *Australian Gymnast*, vol. 11, no. 7, October/November 1986.

\(^\text{593}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{594}\) 'Westfield Gymnastics Spectacular,' *Australian Gymnast*, vol. 12, no. 3, Spring 1987.

\(^\text{595}\) 'Soviet Entertainment Spectacular,' *Australian Gymnast*, vol. 12, no. 4, Spring/Summer 1987.
perhaps an allusion to the networking and deal-making working behind the scenes in international gymnastics. The AGF also stressed how Soviet gymnastics had inspired and educated Australia’s gymnastic community – a favour that would long ‘be remembered’.  

Between such events, and at a more serious level, Australia launched its own international competition: the biennial Australia Cup in 1985, renamed the Konica Bicentennial International Gymnastic Cup when it was held the second time in 1987. The calibre of the event was impressive, boasting athletes from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, China, East Germany, Romania, Italy, the Soviet Union, Japan, Great Britain, and the US. Such events were just some of the ways Australian gymnastics became more visible internationally, increasing their reputation through exposure, and also providing the opportunity to receive valuable feedback from the international community on the progress of Australia gymnastics. The hosting of competitions brought invitations to compete in more overseas events, compounding these benefits. By the competition’s 1989 event, Australian Kylie Shadbolt won Australia’s first WAG gold medal at such an international competition. That year, Australia found itself ranked under 20th for the first time, and by the time of the next world championships in 1991, the Australian WAG team had moved to number six in the world.

While Australia’s efforts as hosts and competitors improved the nation’s international gymnastic standing, so too did political work behind the scenes. In

596 Ibid.
598 'President's Report,' Australian Gymnast, vol. 14, no. 3, Spring 1989. She won this medal on floor.
1984 Jim Barry was elected to the FIG EC, among an increasingly diverse FIG leadership. Moreover, when Australia was elected to the EC in 1984, so were China and the US, ‘thus removing the domination of Europe,’ wrote Barry. Indeed, when contacted for this research, he noted this shift in gymnastics power during the 1980s, stressing how important such committees were in deciding gymnastics’ champions.

It was at Australia’s insistence that the Pacific Alliance of National Gymnastic Federations was established in an attempt to counter the euro-centric leadership and calendar. Formed during the centenary year of the FIG, the Pacific Alliance showed ‘how much Europe has [heretofore] dominated gymnastic thinking,’ and symbolized ‘the first stages of regionalization of the International Gymnastic Federation.’ Regionalization, allowing ‘more balanced development’ and promoting gymnastics ‘right around the world’, would become a key feature of Titov’s leadership.

After the first FIG Congress in his new EC position, Barry enthused: ‘All Technical Committees with their better balanced membership seem determined to improve the image and development of our sport… the Executive Committee with its much wider representation made the Federation Delegates feel comfortable with the programmes and strategies that are being put in place.’ Reflecting on Australia’s position in the FIG committees since Barry’s first appointment,

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601 Barry, 'President's Report,' vol. 10, no. 20, December 1984. The first official Pacific Alliance competition was held in Australia in 1982.
Chetkovich summarized Australia’s position: ‘I don’t know that we’ve greatly affected world gymnastics, but we’ve been part of the conversation.’

**Professionalization in the 1980s**

The changes to Australian and American gymnastics in the 1980s must be understood in the context of growing professionalization of sport during that decade. Under Samaranch’s leadership the IOC slowly began to move away from amateurism, shifting the economic landscape of elite sport. The reception in gymnastics was mixed; on the one hand athletes embraced their new opportunities, and organizations like the AIS utilized new sponsorship rules to their advantage. The FIG, however, was less progressive, and the sport’s popularity between Olympic years faltered as a result.

In a study of the commercialization of the Olympic movement, Wenn and Martyn noted that it shifted from an organization barely staying afloat, to being one of the most lucrative international corporations. But they also showed that the groundwork for Samaranch’s efforts had been laid by many others: Brundage set the precedent for selling television broadcasting rights which had formed the bulk of the IOC’s income to the 1980s, and Killanin demanded that the local organizing committees share responsibility for these negotiations with the IOC. Samaranch, with his right hand man, Richard Pound, attributed responsibility for this move to the IOC alone. Then, in the midst of emerging competing movements (like the Goodwill Games), Samaranch sought a way to establish the Olympics as the pinnacle of sport,

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while attracting more spectators and thus more revenue. The most obvious solution to both of these situations was to allow professional athletes. Understanding a transition process that was far from straightforward for the ‘Olympic family’ requires analysis of Samaranch’s attitudes, of how the IOC negotiated the change, and of discussions within the FIG.

**The Olympic Perspective**

‘The Olympic movement must forget the word “amateur” and open its doors to the world’s best athletes. The Olympics Games are now the major sports event in the world, and we must allow the best athletes to take part.’ This was Samaranch’s announcement at the beginning of his IOC presidency in 1981, clearly setting his Olympic agenda for the coming decade. However, the Olympic movement was not bound to Samaranch’s aims alone, and much consultation was necessary for the slow transition to professionalism. The Olympic Congress needed to vote in any official changes to the rules, and even then, the sports federations could maintain their own amateur rules within the Olympic framework. Thus, at the Baden-Baden Congress of 1981, athlete representatives appeared for the first time, and the IOC amended its rules to allow the international sporting federations to create their own eligibility rules, resulting in wide ranging approaches to defining amateurism. Yet the public was not always in favour of the increasing professionalization of sport.

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After tennis first allowed professionals under the age of 20 to compete at the 1984 Olympics, the next step was to expand professionalism into more sports.\textsuperscript{609} In February 1985, the IOC Executive voted to allow professional tennis, ice hockey and football players into the 1988 Games at their federations’ request, as long as the athletes were less than 23 years old.\textsuperscript{610} The ‘experimental’ rule was to apply to the 1988 Games only, as a trial towards wider professionalization in the Olympics. It came as a result of pressure from the IFs of those sports, combined with Samaranch’s sympathy for the matter, and the IOC soon indicated that more sports might later be included if their federations requested it.

In 1986, however, Samaranch had to placate public concerns over the haste of professionalization. The eleven member executive board of the Olympic Committee ‘endorsed a plan to give professional and State athletes the same opportunity.’\textsuperscript{611} The issue was to be voted upon at the Olympic General Assembly of November, and the decision would supersede the 1981 decision to leave the question of eligibility to the IFs. But by October, meetings of the National Olympic Committees that would be voting at the General Assembly indicated little support for the move. By November 1986 the only two supporters of Samaranch’s push for professionalization were New Zealand’s Lance Cross and Britain’s Charles Palmer ‘who called for an end to “hypocrisy” and for the Olympic movement to face the “reality” that professionals had already participated in the Games.’\textsuperscript{612} Indeed, much

\textsuperscript{609} Although tennis players under 20 had been allowed to participate at Los Angeles, tennis was an exhibition sport at these Games.


\textsuperscript{611} ‘Move to Open up Olympic Games to Professionals,’ \textit{Canberra Times}, 14 February 1986.

\textsuperscript{612} ’No Haste’ in Allowing Olympic Pros,’ \textit{Canberra Times}, 26 April 1986.
of the resistance came from the Eastern bloc, which would undoubtedly be disadvantaged by inclusion of the West’s top paid athletes. As Samaranch observed, there was ‘no difference between professionals and Soviet-bloc State-supported athletes’.  

**The Gymnastics Perspective**

While the IOC leadership was open to professionalization, the FIG was not. Noting the inclusion of football, tennis and hockey in the Games, the FIG questioned how sports with major professional branches could include paid athletes at Olympic Games.  

A year later, in 1986, the FIG remained unimpressed with the IOC’s new direction, yet appeared to have no official information about its implementation. ‘As far as the FIG is concerned, our statutory dispositions and Rule 26 [the amateur rule] of the Olympic Charter are still both applicable and applied.’  

Still committed to its traditional roots, and those of the twentieth century sporting federation movement, the FIG refused to entertain the idea of professionalization for the remainder of the decade. Although superficially expressing concerns over athlete safety and the quality of the sport, such fears reflected snobbery in favour of the sanctity of classical Greek Olympic sport. ‘Professionalism in gymnastics would rapidly lead us on a downward path’, suggested Titov, with coaches quickly ‘replaced by “publicity

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613 Ibid.


agents” or, worse, by “impresarios …”. 616

As demonstrated within the IOC membership, the FIG was probably not alone in its misgivings, but its reluctance to abandon amateurism disadvantaged gymnastics in an era of emerging commercialization of sport. While greater income enabled other sports to invest more in development, gymnastics was increasingly invisible as the quadrennial Olympics became its main source of revenue, compared with the income and publicity attached to other sports that held frequent World Cups, World Championships and had major leagues. Both interest and financial investment in WAG suffered as a result. 617

Outside the FIG, public opinion was divided. The potential benefits for Western nations being able to include their top athletes were recognized, particularly in Australia, but there was an equal amount of opposition from those who clung to late nineteenth century Olympic ideals. In Australia, media support for professionalism was entangled with the establishment of the AIS. One mid 1980s Canberra reporter observed:

The development of the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra has provided the opportunity for many not only to improve their performances but, through scholarships and job opportunities, to remain active in their chosen sport. This trend to semi-professionalism should not disturb Australians; it is merely helping make up some of the leeway against the overseas stars who in the communist bloc are fully supported by the State and in capitalist countries are supported by university scholarships and advertising contracts. 618

616 Ibid.
The Australian gymnastics community certainly supported professionalization too. ‘The world of sport has become full time/professional,’ wrote Australian WTC President Frances Crampton. ‘And we shall only maintain/improve our place in it with the assistance of sponsors, public awareness and appropriate reaction, and through the establishment of ventures such as the Australian Institute of Sport’.619

With the AGF seeking funding to support their bid for Olympic team competition by 1992, swim and sportswear company Speedo became its official sponsor in 1981. After Prime Minister Fraser opened the National Gymnastics Training Centre in early 1983, the sponsorship of Allied Grocery Products allowed it to remain open for the following three years.620 By 1984, the National Championships were being sponsored by Nestlė’s Australian malt drink powder ‘Milo,’ and broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.621 Despite the FIG’s own reluctance to modernize, the Australian Gymnastics Federation was clearly keen to capitalize on increasing financial opportunities in sport.

While the inclusion of its top professional athletes would have benefited the USA too, American members of the IOC were influenced by their own experiences as successful Olympic amateurs. Responding to an IOC proposition to change the eligibility rule in 1986, former US Olympian and long time IOC member Julian Roosevelt wrote in the *New York Times*:

> Let’s face the fact that if the IOC accepts professionals into the Games they will have abandoned their roles as leaders in sport and as the traditional champion of the Olympics, and are merely in the entertainment business, knuckling under to

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the wishes and desires of other groups within the public, the media and commercialism.\textsuperscript{622}

Yet other writing of the period indicates support for professionalization amongst the wider population. Historian and \textit{New York Times} contributor, Richard Mandell argued that the boycott of the 1980s Games postponed an inevitable discussion of the out-dated amateur rule.\textsuperscript{623} Moreover, he pointed out that preserving the amateur rule preserved for the federations the sometimes-vast amounts of money rewarded for winning medals. ‘A victory or even media exposure is now simply too valuable even to pretend that the supremely talented people who compete in Olympics should be denied any share of the enormous sums of money that are about.’\textsuperscript{624} According to such views, amateurism was rather ‘an obstacle to the determination of who is really the best’.\textsuperscript{625}

Although professionalization was rarely discussed within the gymnastics community through \textit{International Gymnast}, and despite definite opposition from the FIG, the potential income from private sponsors became a profitable and typical career trajectory for many successful American Olympic gymnasts. Following their historic successes at Los Angeles, the American team of 1984 was swamped with lucrative offers from companies interested in the rising popularity of the sport. ‘For some athletes, the Olympic Games became a ticket to the whirling, sparkling, all-American, publicity-and-commerce merry-go-round,’ one \textit{New York Times} writer

\textsuperscript{623} Mandell, 'Stakes Too High for Olympians to Remain Amateurs.' 'It may be that that the Moscow Games of 1980, with their limited capitalist participation and totalitarian control, postponed an inevitable deluge of disputes, compromises, evasions, lies and jokes that the observance of Olympic “pure sport” now requires.'
\textsuperscript{624} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{625} Ibid.
observed. Retton became the first female spokesperson for cereal brand Wheaties, signed a contract with hair product manufacturers, Vidal Sassoon, and agreed to be a worldwide representative for youth sports programmes for fast food chain McDonalds. Meanwhile, several of the successful MAG and WAG gymnasts at the '84 Games won acting opportunities as a direct result of their athletic success. Despite FIG rules rendering them ineligible for further Olympic competition, the victorious American gymnasts were happy to renounce their amateur status and reap the rewards of their Los Angeles success.

As economic opportunities for gymnasts grew, so did their international success. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Soviet and Romanian gymnasts raised both their income and standard of living through international victories, prompting Fink to assert they were the real capitalists in gymnastics. Meanwhile their Western counterparts, relying on private funding for training and competition, had no opportunity to do the same, no matter how successful. However, with relaxed rules on professionalism in the 1980s turning the tide on potential income from Olympic sport, it cannot be coincidence that at this point American gymnasts broke through into international success. Although improved training systems, better networking, and the 1984 boycott also played a part in creating a more favourable environment for Western gymnasts, the new economic situation was also crucial to changes in the power balance of international gymnastics.

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627 Ibid. For instance Kurt Thomas starred in the film *Gymkata*, Mary Lou Retton had her own television show, and Kristie Phillips also transitioned into acting.

628 Hardy Fink, 2014.
FIG Developments in Judging

In addition to improved economic incentives promoting Western success in WAG, the 1980s also saw the realization of the necessary work behind the scenes. With a new balance of power in WAG, thanks to the changed geographical composition of the FIG’s committees, President Yuri Titov was able to create the conditions for fairer judging of the sport, particularly through new technology.

At the 1985 World Championships, the FIG pioneered six-person judging panels. The WTC was thrilled with this development, claiming their support was vindicated after ‘a new standard of differentiation and objectivity was achieved in the evaluation of the exercise.’ Australia too was excited at its new prospects. ‘Judging also appeared fairer and less political’, wrote Browne. ‘Certainly, in the case of the women, with six judges, it was evident.’

Despite such reviews, a report that same year from Fink on behalf of the University of British Columbia highlighted the complexity of judging that remained. He questioned the dual roles often held by judges (commonly coach/judge or state official/judge), arguing that ‘in indirect competitive sports the officials must do the cheating for the athlete – and cheat they do, usually against the wishes or knowledge of the athlete.’ With strong suggestions that collaborative scoring had been skewing results, Fink recommended to the FIG that judges have no access to each other’s scores.

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632 Ibid., 65.
Titov remained convinced there was more to be done, and he too was reluctant to attribute scoring controversies to judging incompetence. Rather, he saw ‘a subjective attitude in the evaluation of the real value of the exercises,’ or in other words, biased, cheating judges.\(^{633}\) This was revealed particularly in the abundance of ‘perfect’ routines receiving a 10.0 score. Such judging was not only a problem within gymnastics, but as Titov alluded, also had implications for gymnastics’ inclusion in the Olympics. ‘This situation can be in favour of a persistence of a certain corruption which would be very dangerous for our sport, even a vital danger.’\(^{634}\) Herein lie the roots of the later changes that would farewell the 10.0 system.

After listening to the concerns of the national federations, and in response to the findings of a recent symposium, in 1986 the FIG introduced the role of the Superior Jury: an appointed Technical Committee member who would oversee the work of the judges. ‘Worldwide principles must be applied and the TCs must control in a collegial manner and permanently during the competitions,’\(^{635}\) explained Titov. So with the assistance of Longines technology, the Superior Jury’s role was to react immediately in the case of a subjective evaluation.\(^{636}\)

Longines, the Swiss watchmaker, had developed a new computerized control system to encourage greater accountability for judges. Introduced at the 1986 World Cup in Beijing, ‘the new system allowed for the immediate display of the work from

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\(^{634}\) Ibid.

\(^{635}\) Ibid.

\(^{636}\) Ibid.
each judge in the panel... For the first time, each judge’s score was displayed, rather than simply showing the final average score. The WTC in particular, was pleased with this new system, noting some months later that it assisted them with controlling conflicts of interest in judging.

It must generally be said that we have many good and reliable judges… Sometimes, however, they are subject to such a degree of outsider pressure that they are unable to remain objective. This is a situation we must avoid in the interests of obtaining as unbiased and fair an assessment of the gymnasts’ performances as possible. We hope that the use of the computer, among other things, will render us assistance in this context. The WTC believes that the use of the computer will afford support.

Although the FIG’s initiatives improved judging as the decade progressed, problems still remained. Two incidents at the 1980 Olympics may have helped prompt the above reforms. Later in the decade, the rise of American gymnastics encouraged Soviet and East German score-fixing to defend their domination against the encroaching American gymnasts.

First, during the floor finals at the Moscow Olympics, Comaneci’s score was upgraded from 9.00 to 9.50. WTC chairwoman Ellen Berger of East Germany said the British judge had mistakenly entered her score as 9.50 instead of 10.0: the upgraded score was a correct recalculation. The British judge, however, insisted that Berger had changed the score following a protest from the Romanian team. In any

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event, the scores resulted in a tie for gold between Comaneci and Soviet Nellie Kim.  

The second controversy at these Olympics again involved Comaneci. According to her, on the final rotation of the All-Around competition she was second up on beam, while Soviet Yelena Davydova was to compete last on bars. After the first gymnast performed on beam, the six judges ‘huddled together,’ holding up the competition for nearly half an hour, until frontrunner Davydova had finished and it was clear that Comaneci needed a 9.95 to win. When Comaneci was finally allowed to compete, further collaborative judging took place and Berger intervened to award Comaneci 9.85. While Comaneci dismissed allegations of score fixing, attributing the result to her fall on the first day of competition, her coach, Károlyi, insisted the judges had ‘conspired to have Davydova perform her bar routine before [Comaneci] competed on the beam so that they could score her higher and ensure her the gold medal.’ Although Comaneci’s routine was not perfect, the lengthy and heated debate amongst the judges over this score does indicate a lack of transparent judging. However, the USOC report on those Games indicates it was not the Soviets at fault. The Head Judge on beam was Romania’s Maria Simionescu, who knowing the 9.85 was too low, refused to enter it into the system. After thirty minutes of arguing, Berger stepped in and did it for her. With 9.85, Comaneci was tied for

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640 Comaneci, Letters to a Young Gymnast, 102.
641 Burnton, ‘Nadia Comaneci Scores a Perfect 10.’
642 Comaneci, Letters to a Young Gymnast, 103.
second place with an East German gymnast Maxi Gnauck, while the gold medal went to Davydova, only 0.075 points ahead. East German WTC Chairwoman Berger minimized the allegations of cheating in her 1980 report, noting that the video recordings of the performance revealed ‘incorrect work on the part of one or two judges, the head-judge and the experts at the beam’. 

At the two following Olympics, judging problems began to involve the United States, now a growing threat to the powers of world gymnastics. At the 1984 Olympics, the US gymnastics team was on home ground. Seizing this advantage, Károlyi, who was not an official team coach and thus not allowed on the floor of the competition, jumped over the press barricade to congratulate his gymnast, Mary Lou Retton, on the floor. Ellen Berger, head of the jury and in charge of the competition for those Games, warned Károlyi she would impose the 0.50 penalty if it happened again. Knowing such a rule was unlikely to be enforced in front of a large American crowd, the next day he did it again: no penalty was enforced and Retton went on to win the competition with less than a half a point margin. Head coach of the 1984 US team, Don Peters, alleged: ‘[Berger’s] prestige was wounded, but she chickened out, because it would have taken the medal away from Mary Lou here in Los Angeles.’ While home ground advantage may have enabled the WTC to turn a blind eye to the American infringement in 1984, it aggravated tensions between East and West that came to the fore at the following Olympics.

In Seoul in 1988, team USA missed out on the bronze medal due to the enforcement of a similar technical penalty by FIG chiefs Titov and Berger. As Kelly Garrison-Steves performed her bar routine, teammate Rhonda Faehn mounted the podium to move a springboard out of her way. While such assistance is permitted, the teammate is required to dismount the podium as soon as the equipment is in place. Faehn, however, moved to the side of the podium to watch Garrison-Steves finish her routine. Amidst American outrage, Titov claimed that several nations had reported the infraction. The bars judges, along with Titov and Berger, reviewed the video footage and voted overwhelmingly to penalize the US team, taking half a point from their team total, relegating them to fourth place behind the Eastern European powers: the USSR, Romania and East Germany.

Peters called it an ‘obscure’ rule he had never seen enforced in his twenty years experience. He also blamed his rival Károlyi for the incident: Berger’s intention may have been ‘to gain back the prestige she lost at the 1984 Games… when she failed to impose a penalty on the US team that would have cost its prize student, Mary Lou Retton, the gold medal in All-Around competition.’ Károlyi, however, called it foul play. ‘That's dirty, and that's sick. What does it matter, even if the kid is on the podium? What change is there in the routine? It doesn't disturb anything. I've never seen that before.’

American newspapers seized on the controversy as a sign of political manoeuvring in WAG, persecuting the American team to increase East Germany’s

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648 Ibid.
649 Hudson, 'Karolyi Angered Gym Official in '84, Peters Says.'
650 Ibid.
651 Janofsky, 'Karolyi Cries Foul as U.S. Slips into 4th.'
chance of taking the bronze medal.\textsuperscript{652} ‘It's obvious the East German judge wanted to keep the scores down,’ Károlyi charged. ‘They're fighting desperately to keep their place.’\textsuperscript{653} Indeed, the results of the Seoul judging and the 0.50 penalty enabled Berger’s GDR to clutch the bronze with less than a 0.475 margin over team USA.

The American media may have been justified in making such accusations. Asked how Cold War tensions have affected gymnastics, Chetkovich immediately mentioned ‘deals behind the scenes’: ‘There’s definite blocs of judging. When the Americans started to come through… I’d say a lot of unfair judging happened!’\textsuperscript{654}

\textbf{Apparatus and Acrobatization}

Throughout the 1980s WAG continued to acrobatize, although this period was perhaps not as revolutionary as the decade before. Rather, it built on trends established in the 1970s. Although gymnasts continued to innovate on the uniquely female apparatus, uneven bars and beam, developments on the shared apparatus of vault and floor took a new turn: female gymnasts also began creating new elements and styles not directly taken from MAG. Although it still had concerns, the FIG was now more supportive of acrobatization, seeking to control it through the Code of Points and working to adapt the apparatus to the sport’s changes. In some respects, though, several high profile injuries forced their hand, prompting a reassessment of safety standards in WAG.

\textit{Originality In WAG Acrobatization}

During the 1980s, more gymnasts began to perform increasingly acrobatic elements

\textsuperscript{652} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{653} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{654} Chetkovich, 2014.
taken from MAG. In 1984, the WTC report confirmed this: ‘The most important trend in the continued development of women’s gymnastics was once again the creative variety and imaginative combination of transfer to other apparatus of elements or links which are basically familiar, among others, elements “borrowed” from men’s gymnastics.’ However, with hindsight it becomes apparent that this decade also took a turn toward the creation of entirely original elements. Here it is suggested that Elena Mukhina’s catastrophic injury (which will shortly be explored in further detail), was a catalyst in awakening dormant fears over women’s appropriation of elements from MAG. In response, WAG experienced a new wave of female-led innovation in acrobatics. Two notable examples of this are the ‘marathon’ tumbling series and the Yurchenko vault. As seen in the decade prior, the WTC responded to this continued acrobatization with renewed rules and equipment upgrades.

_Elena Mukhina and the Thomas Salto_

At the beginning of the decade, the focus on the floor was on the achievement of one spectacular element at the end of the tumbling run. Indeed, Mukhina, the 1978 world champion and floor champion, achieved her success with this approach. Her coach, a successful former MAG gymnast, Mikhail Klimenko, transformed Mukhina’s career by working on MAG skills rarely performed by women. Mukhina was the first female gymnast to compete a full twisting double backwards somersault on floor – only a few years after the first women attempted double somersaults alone.656

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For the 1980 Olympics, Mukhina again looked to MAG to add a new skill to WAG’s repertoire: the Thomas salto. Invented by an American male gymnast only a year earlier, after a round-off flic flac the gymnast would complete one and a half backward vertical rotations with one and a half twists, tucking the head to land on the back of the shoulders and smoothly dispersing the force of landing into a forward roll. In the absence of her coach, Mukhina landed her skill incorrectly, coming down on her chin, while the rest of her body continued rotating over her head. She was immediately paralysed from the neck down.

Initially, both Eastern and Western media reported that Mukhina had sustained a minor injury and would no longer be competing in the Moscow Games. Reluctant to release any information damaging its prestige, the Soviet Union provided only murky details about the accident (both the element and the apparatus), and blamed the injury solely on Mukhina and her disobedience from coaching instructions. In October 1980, four months after the accident, *International Gymnast Magazine* reported:

Elena Moukhina [sic] had such a dangerous fall in early July during training (we were told, from the Uneven Bars) that she lost consciousness and had to be transported to Minsk Hospital in an alarming condition. But then came news to the effect that the 1978 world champion was again able to move her arms and legs, so that there is obviously no chance of paraplegia. Contrary to the will of her coach, Viktor Klimenko, Elena had continued her training and when she tried to do a ‘difficult acrobatic element’ – as we are told – fell and hit the nape of her neck.

During the Games Yuri Titov also blamed Mukhina for the accident and minimized the seriousness of the injury:

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657 Ibid.
Elena Mukhina took only ninth place and so she lost a chance to be included in the national team, and so on the practice meeting, in the clinics, she tried to invent a new exercise which she thinks can help her to be chosen for the team. And because it’s varying success and a new one for her, she fell down and made injury.\(^\text{659}\)

When asked by the reporter if she would ever compete again, Titov continued: ‘I don’t know exactly because she was at the age limit; she is 20, and usually in gymnastics it’s time to leave gymnastics. But I’m sure that you can have a chance to make inquiries in some moments, maybe some days when she will be recovered’.\(^\text{660}\)

Mukhina would never recover. It would be years until she was given the chance to publicly explain to a Soviet newspaper, that ‘her accident was due to intense training with a leg injury while being on diuretic furosemide … Her trainer had pushed her to the limit in trying out new elements that she was not comfortable with.’\(^\text{661}\) While diuretics were not banned at this time (to achieve weight loss), their dehydrating effect is known to drain concentration, a dangerous problem when attempting such complex manoeuvres.\(^\text{662}\) However Mukhina did not directly blame her coach, who was not at training when she was injured. With some insight, she instead framed her accident as a symptom of the Soviet Union’s broken gymnastics system. Forced to train when injured and exhausted, Mukhina saw her injury as ‘inevitable’ under the conditions:

\(^{659}\) ‘1980 Olympics Gymnastics Titov on Mukhina Injury,’
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXBRLLpkDDM.

\(^{660}\) ‘1980 Olympics Gymnastics Titov on Mukhina Injury.’


\(^{662}\) Hardy Fink, 2014.
There are such concepts as the honour of the club, the honour of the team, the honour of the national squad, the honour of the flag. They are words behind which the person isn’t perceived. I was injured because everyone around me was observing neutrality and keeping silent. After all, they saw that I wasn’t ready to perform that element. But they kept quiet.  

Building on her allegations of problems in the system, in a 1998 interview with *Ogonyok* magazine, Mukhina commented on the extent of the public ‘deception’ over her injury.

[People writing] kept asking when I would return to competition... Of course, those people weren't to blame for the fact that they were being deceived - after all, it was obvious right away that I would never return to a normal life, let alone to sports. Yes, they were being deceived. The fans had been trained to believe in athletes' heroism - athletes with fractures return to the soccer field and those with concussions return to the ice rink. Why? For what purpose? In order to report that ‘the task of the Homeland’ has been completed?

While sport’s focus was on the collective, not the individual, Mukhina’s case demonstrates that at times it was even sport at the expense of the individual, so long as it furthered the agenda of the nation.

In his thesis, Dufraisse provides some insight into the messy handling of this situation, remarking that the incident ‘violently disrupted the image of the USSR,’ symbolizing the extent of problems within the sports system. ‘The paralysis of the young gymnast makes clear the dysfunction of the elite sports training process: training in defiance of physical limitations, the exploitation of young children and adolescents, running acrobatics, excessive medicalization.’ He argued that the fall gave credence to the negative rumours surrounding Soviet elite sport, when citizens

were increasingly disgruntled with investment into it. ‘The sad consequences of this trauma contribute to accepting the stereotypes made by the enemy, the selling of Soviet sports as the “product of a mechanized and dehumanized system…”’

But why was the skill necessary? Mukhina was already one of the leading women in terms of acrobatic difficulty: in addition to her full twisting double backwards somersault, she was one of the few gymnasts able to perform a double backward salto dismount off beam, as well as a variant of Korbut’s famed bar release with an additional full twist. Perhaps her attempt at the Thomas salto can be better understood as an answer to America’s Cold War challenge. The element had been invented by American Kurt Thomas a year earlier at the 1979 World Championships in Fort Worth. Mukhina’s Thomas salto was meant to reclaim Soviet domination of elite WAG, which had already been wounded by Comaneci some years earlier. Mukhina was meant to demonstrate not only that a Soviet could perform this element, but also improve on it as the first female to do so.

The FIG allowed the potentially fatal element to remain in WAG, although it was rarely performed. In the 1990s North Korean gymnast Hwang Bo-Sil performed a lesser variation, a half twist instead of the Thomas salto’s 1½ twist. Nonetheless the rollout exit caused problems and Bo-Sil narrowly missed replicating Mukhina’s disaster when she too landed headfirst in 1989. Bo-Sil, however, continued to perform the skill until the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, after which roll-outs were removed from the women’s Code of Points as they were considered too dangerous.

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667 Video footage shows Bo-Sil’s accident in a 1989 competition. 'Painful Gymnastics Accident,' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4i2QJiqK74.
In a show of obscure gender logic, the element still remains in the MAG Code and is not an uncommon skill.

The Creation of the Yurchenko Vault

Bridging the gap between elements adopted from MAG and entirely female-created innovations, was the invention of the Yurchenko vault: one of the most significant developments in WAG’s history. Named after Soviet gymnast Natalia Yurchenko who first performed it at the 1982 World Cup, the Yurchenko required less power than the other somersaulting vaults such as the Tsukahara or handspring salto, but instead demanded high risk, much courage, and immense precision. The vault involved a round-off onto the springboard, feet blindly touching down in the small take-off area, before arching backwards to unseeingly place the hands on the narrow of the vaulting horse. The gymnast then pushed off the horse to complete another 1½ backward saltos to land upright on the mat behind.

There are several reasons why the Yurchenko was created and popularized in this decade. First in the 1980s the FIG limited the number of identical vaults a team could use, thus demanding variety, if not innovation on vault. Women had nearly exhausted the limits of the springboard and vaulting horse of the time, with forward entry vaults, such as handsprings and Tsukaharas dominating their repertoires. In this context it is unsurprising that new vaults were created. The second reason for the

vault’s appearance this decade is in the changing gymnastics body. As discussed in chapter four, after Korbut and Comaneci WAG was increasingly populated by small, pre-pubescent girls. The Yurchenko vault was a solution to the problem of getting these bodies over a vaulting horse as tall as them.

In 1979, Yurchenko and her famed coach, Vladislav Rastorotsky671 witnessed a male gymnast, Victor Levinkov, performing the round off back handspring vault at a Soviet Union competition.672 Because of his status, scores, or its lack of utility in traversing the horse lengthways as men were required to, Levinkov’s vault did not catch on and he faded into obscurity. But in Levinkov’s vault Rastorotsky saw a solution to the problems of getting the small female gymnasts over the horse, which they vaulted sideways. The round-off on to the springboard would ensure the continuation of maximum horizontal momentum, making up for less mass on the springboard.673 The net result would be a larger force upon springboard contact, and thus an easier, high and fast rotating somersault. Not only did the Yurchenko provide the height and distance for less powerful gymnasts, it was also seen as a shortcut to higher scores due to its complexity, difficulty and risk.674 After its international

671 Vladislav Rastorotsky was the gymnastics genius who had moulded Tourischeva, as well as Yurchenko’s equally pioneering teammate Shaposhnikova.
672 Natalia Yurchenko, ‘Yurchenko Vault,’
debut it became so widely used that it was the most frequently performed vault by the time of the Seoul Games in 1988. But it could be very dangerous.

In 1988, fifteen year-old American gymnast Julissa Gomez missed her foot on the springboard after her round-off, slamming headfirst into the hard vaulting horse behind her. She was instantly paralysed. By all accounts it was a manoeuvre she was not equipped to perform, despite her high level of skill and commitment to elite gymnastics. ‘You could tell it was not a safe vault for her to be doing,’ a teammate from Gomez’ days with the Károlyis observed. ‘Someone along the way should have stopped her.’ Károlyi himself was reported to have chided Gomez about her inconsistent foot placement on the springboard, warning she would miss some day. But for three years, Gomez trained the vault without serious injury, and after leaving Károlyi six months before the Olympics, her new coach, Al Fong, did not stop her, even though another of his gymnasts had fractured her first cervical vertebra practicing the vault a year earlier.

Journalists such as Joan Ryan attributed the tragedy to systemic child abuse by American gymnastics coaches, in much the same way Dufraisse describes the symbolism of Mukhina’s injury. But Ryan’s explanation is too broad to explain why Gomez was performing the vault in the first place. To put her injury in context, the FIG Medical Commission labelled the world championships a year earlier in 1987,

675 Young-Hoo Kwon, Virginia L. Fortney, and In-Sik Shin, '3-D Analysis of Yurchenko Vaults Performed by Female Gymnasts During the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games,' International Journal of Sport Biomechanics, 6, (1990). The authors of this study identified the Yurchenko layout and the Yurchenko layout full twist as the two most frequently performed vaults at the 1988 Olympic Games.


677 Ryan, Little Girls in Pretty Boxes, 25.

678 Ibid.
the ‘most “murderous” championships in a long time’, with 17 gymnasts taken to hospital as emergency cases.\textsuperscript{679} While there is no more detailed data and it is likely injuries were spread across different apparatus, such comments indicate increasingly unsafe practices in WAG, likely due to rushed attempts to keep pace with acrobatization without proper training.

While Ryan conceded the ‘necessity’ of the vault at the international level, she did not emphasize it enough: gymnasts were performing this vault with little biomechanical understanding of its dynamics, with rushed preparations, and were content to do so because it was crucial to keep pace with Soviet developments in Cold War sporting contests. ‘Everyone was using [the Yurchenko],’ commented Becky Buwick, coach of American 1988 Olympian, Kelly Garrison. ‘We were definitely pressured to make sure she was keeping up with the (younger Americans) and the Soviets.’\textsuperscript{680}

Several high level US coaches were outraged by American use of the vault, both at the risk it implied for the sake of Cold War prestige, and because Americans were chasing the Soviets, rather than leading the way. ‘The whole thing of going after the Russians is ridiculous,’ asserted coach Don McPherson. ‘When they (Russians) talk, we listen and scramble back to our gyms to work on it. It’s a disservice to the kids to teach them the (Yurchenko) vault.’\textsuperscript{681} Others such as Illinois coach Beverley Mackes advocated abandoning the Yurchenko in favour of an American brand of gymnastics. ‘If Mary Lou Retton can get a 10 without a round-

\textsuperscript{680} Mike Reilley, 'It's Dangerous from the Start: Gymnastics: Some Officials and Coaches Wonder If the Spectacular Yurchenko Vault Is Worth the Risk,' \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 17 November 1989.
\textsuperscript{681} Reilley, 'Is New Vault Lifting Gymnasts into Danger?.'
off, then why should we be trying it? To keep up with the Russians? It’s time we start setting the pace.’

On the Soviet side, Yurchenko and her successor, Svetlana Boginskaya, both argued that the vault was not risky with the right preparations, while Korbut suggested that ‘I don't think it's the element that is dangerous, but how the athletes approach [it]’. Nonetheless testimony collected by Ryan indicates a deep fear about the vault among American gymnasts. ‘Everybody felt like they had to do it, and they rushed to do it,’ recalled 1984 Olympian Kathy Johnson. ‘It’s not that hard to do, but if something goes wrong, it’s a disaster… back then I wouldn’t watch them. I just didn’t think we had it down pat. Too much could go wrong.’

Eastern bloc gymnasts had years of training, with such attention to detail that they did not perceive the Yurchenko vault to be risky. In contrast, many American gymnasts learned the vault too quickly, without perfecting the round off to the spring, without consistently demonstrating a safe first flight phase onto the horse. Collating the impressions of both American and Soviet gymnasts, the sentiment is that gymnasts outside the Eastern bloc built their Yurchenkos on unstable foundations. Yet American gymnasts were almost forced to perform the vault if they wanted to maintain their climb towards the top.

_The Marathon Series_

Although less momentous than the above, the development of the marathon tumbling series warrants discussion owing to its female origin. Usually, a gymnast performs a tumbling run starting in one corner, executing three to four elements along the

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682 Ibid.
683 Reilley, 'It's Dangerous from the Start.'
diagonal. At the 1983 world cup, however, Soviet Oksana Omelianchik, did not stop when she reached the opposite corner: she rebounded into a somersault, reversing her direction to continue tumbling back down her line of approach. Expanding on the acrobatic tumbling of the 1970s, these passes, comprising over nine elements, were a hit with audiences and judges. Soon, teammate Elena Shushunova and other top gymnasts, such as Romanian Daniela Silivas, adopted this style. At the world championships two years later, the trend had gained ground, the WTC President’s report noting that such ‘marathon series’ of three or more saltos had increased the density of acrobatics in WAG. However, because it gave little numerical advantage to scores, other than the crowd support it garnered, marathon tumbling became a rarity in WAG. It nonetheless represents an era of innovation, with female gymnasts forging their own path instead of relying on trends already established by male gymnasts.

Such innovation was compounded by a 1985 – 1989 Code of Points rule, which set the ‘start value’ of an optional routine that met all requirements at 9.7: to be scored out of 10 the gymnast needed to earn ‘bonus points’, of which 0.1 could be awarded for each of originality, virtuosity, and an extra element with a difficulty rating of D (each element was ranked on a scale from of difficulty from A-D).

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685 GymnStands, 'Oksana Omelianchik 1985 Worlds Ef Floor,'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bkzn3O2R_0. Omelianchik’s second pass at the 1985 World Championships consisted of: round-off, flic flac, double twist, punch front step out, round off, flic flac, Onodi step out, round off, 1½ roll out.


687 Ellen Berger, 'Women's Technical Committee: Minutes of the Women's Technical Plenary Assembly Held at the Hilton Airport Hotel, Los Angeles, USA on 23rd and
From 1986 onwards an additional 0.1 was awarded for originality, as ‘the notion of “virtuosity” [was] deleted since the bonus points in this context were not applied as the WTC had envisaged.’ In addition, up to 3.0 points were assigned for ‘difficulties’, and 2.5 points for the combinations and the ‘construction of the exercise’. By rewarding both difficulty and combination skills as well as innovation, these codifications indicate the FIG’s appreciation and promotion of acrobatization in the 1980s: an about turn from goals of the WTC in the 1970s.

**FIG Responses to Safety Concerns**

Yet as in the 1970s, codified acrobatization went hand in hand with new fears over athlete safety. In the 1980s, these fears were well founded, given the fates of both Mukhina and Gomez. In his President’s Report of 1988, Titov seemed to allude to Gomez’s accident when he discussed the risk in gymnastics, echoing the way Soviet gymnasts saw accidents in Yurchenkos as the result of improper preparation rather as a problem inherent in the sport itself:

> Gymnastics is not a dangerous sport. We cannot, however, deny that there are several accidents every year. Gymnastics has become a kind of art of ‘flight’ and we are fully aware how dangerous certain movements can be unless adequately practised and prepared. In this domain the coaches have an increased responsibility. Some of them want to obtain immediate results to the detriment of properly planned preparation. It is important that the standard of

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24th July 1984, in *FIG Bulletin*, vol. 123, (December 1984): 111. Each element has a rating of difficulty, with A being the easiest, and at this time, D the most difficult.


each gymnast be carefully observed since a lack of gymnastic maturity is frequently the cause of accidents.690

At the same time, though, the FIG began to enforce stricter safety measures and better equipment. For example, an American proposal to allow coaches on the podium during difficult flight elements on the uneven bars was accepted in 1987, allowing the coach to step in to catch the gymnast, if she missed the bar.691 The FIG responded slowly to the Yurchenko vault by introducing a safety collar only in late 1988, the timing of which suggests it was probably prompted by Julissa Gomez’s accident. The safety collar surrounded the springboard on the Yurchenko entry vaults, so that if the gymnast missed a foot on the springboard, she would still be able to propel herself over the horse.692 Yet use of the collar remained optional for another decade, until further injuries in the 1990s prompted the FIG to enforce its use at all times.

**Conclusion**

Developments in WAG became much more complex in the 1980s, as did its Olympic context. Professionalization and coach immigration had an enormous impact on how the sport was practised in the West, while gymnasts and coaches looked beyond MAG in their search for new elements. Although acrobatization and questionable judging practices continued, they no longer characterized the sport. Instead, it came to be marked by the size of its gymnasts and the cost of reaching

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691 Ellen Berger, 'Women's Technical Committee: Summary of the Minutes of the Meetings Held in Frankfort-on-Main from 16.-20.2.1987,' in *FIG Bulletin*, vol. 133, (June 1987): 59. ‘A coach may be present on the podium during the competition exercises only in the case of D-elements with flight phase during entry and exit.’

elite level: problems that would come to define changes to the sport as it negotiated its way through the final decade of the twentieth century.
Part IV: 1990 – 2000

The development of WAG in the 1990s was affected by many of the issues that had influenced the sport in the preceding decades, despite the changed geo-political landscape. Professionalization remained a contentious issue for the traditionalist FIG, yet this decade saw the organization more willing to capitalize on commercial developments in sport. This trend is not surprising, as the FIG – working under the IOC umbrella – sought to justify gymnastics’ place in an increasingly diverse and spectator orientated Olympic environment. However, one of the most important changes to WAG came about in the 1990s as a result of the end of the Cold War. The breakdown of the Soviet Union not only saw that nation’s gymnastics power fragmented into several smaller, weaker states, it also saw influence within the FIG shift. This was an important development as the organization undertook its largest changes in rewriting the rules of gymnastics – the compulsory routines were abolished and the perfect 10 put in jeopardy. In this context, along with more rigid policing of judging, new methods of obtaining advantages arose. While drug use was minimal, age falsification became a major concern as the FIG increased minimum age requirements. Meanwhile, the disintegration of the Soviet Union accelerated the migration of skilled gymnastics experts to the West that had begun in the 1980s. Thus Western nations underwent significant improvement while one of the strongest gymnastics nations ceased to exist. During the 1990s, WAG was marked by a shift in power, reflecting wider geopolitical reshuffling of that decade. Accordingly, gymnastics become increasingly global, diverse, and competitive.

Chapter seven focuses on the impact of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which I demonstrate was enormously helpful in improving Australian and
American gymnastics, despite bringing with it negative consequences too. Chapter eight explores decisions of the gymnastics leadership in this decade. I argue this was heavily influenced by the negative public image of WAG in the media, combined with pressures to keep in line with IOC directives.
Chapter Seven

Raising the Bar: Soviet Emigration and International Improvement

...Since the 1988 Congress in Seoul, there have been tremendous changes in the world; this has also made itself felt in our sports discipline, gymnastics, and will continue to leave its traces... 693

At the end of 1990, WTC President Ellen Berger made this statement on the changes in world geography that marked the beginning of the decade, and foreshadowed the changes to follow in the coming years. On Christmas day, 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. 694 The reasons behind its collapse are complex. Costly involvement in Afghanistan 695 and economic downturn played a part, as did Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika. Historian Robert Strayer argued that devotion to the idea of socialism had faded by 1990, with diminished support for the Party and system. ‘As the ideology of socialism lost its appeal, so too did the Communist Party, which had provided the organizational glue for the country for more than seventy years.’ 696 In its place, fifteen new nations emerged, as a result of the disintegration of the union of republics. 697 The reverberations of this change were felt throughout the sporting


697 Ibid., 4.
world. In gymnastics, one of the most immediate consequences was the loss of the world’s dominating power.

The study of migration in sport has tended to focus on athletes as the main supply of labour, and globalization of the late twentieth century the primary force behind it. For instance, Bale and Maguire opened their seminal book on sports labour migration with the assumption that it mainly concerned ‘athletes on the move’. 698 They would then frame their research as part of the process of ‘globalization’:

Sports labour migration is arguably gathering momentum and appears to be closely interwoven with the broader process of global sports development... In turn, this is interwoven with a process of accelerated globalization which has been unfolding at least since the late nineteenth century. 699

However, such understandings do not adequately explain the shifts experienced in gymnastics. Here, the labour was predominantly, if not exclusively in the form of coaching staff. The migratory patterns were indeed global in destination, but resulted from the newfound openness of borders after the end of the Cold War. Eastern European experts moved westward in the 1990s, spreading their technical knowledge beyond the Soviet Union, but also creating cultural clashes in their new gymnasiaums. Rather than focussing on the experience of the migrants, this chapter centres on the impact of these coaches on gymnastics, and in doing, so seeks to illuminate new perspectives on historical discourse surrounding sports labour migration.

**The Breakdown of the Soviet Union**

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the once unstoppable USSR broke

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699 Ibid., 5.
into several smaller, weaker nations in gymnastics terms. Each now had a smaller field from which to recruit a team, and each now had to rival the others on the world stage. Theodora Gotz, a former international gymnast and international elite (brevet) judge from New Zealand, commented on the impact of this fragmentation: 'Now that Russia’s broken up, Russia’s not at the top anymore. Because all those individual states make up their own teams.'

The Soviet national team had lost the advantage of selecting from fifteen republics, and those sixteen now had the problem of finding enough gymnasts to form their own teams. The FIG’s response to the break-up of the USSR was to announce that ‘the format of the Team World Championships 1994 in Dortmund [would] be changed. 24 instead of 20 teams [would] be allowed to participate’.

The dilution of Soviet power did little to ameliorate the judging and score-fixing problems that had plagued gymnastics to this point. ‘You might almost argue that the fall of the Soviet Union made things worse for a short while,’ mused Fink.

Suddenly there were 10 or 15 of them and if anyone wanted to collaborate then there was a whole bunch more to collaborate with. It worked for a short while perhaps, but then there were so many created ties. So suddenly we had tie breaking at the Olympics.

Indeed, the substance of this allegation was perhaps compounded by the exodus of Soviet experts who began to work for other countries, bringing with them their understanding of negotiating scores.

This was problematic for the FIG, who had been scolded by the IOC about the abundance of ex-aequo (tied) rankings since the early 1980s. The issue first came

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700 Theodora Gotz, interviewed by Georgia Cervin, (Auckland, New Zealand), 2014.
702 Hardy Fink, 2014.
to attention after the IOC Baden-Baden Congress of 1981. Arpad Csanadi, IOC sports director, continued to remind the FIG of the necessity of avoiding ‘the situation of having more than one athlete gaining the same placing (ex aequo)… in future Olympic Games’. In 1982 the FIG was tasked with devising a system to separate those gymnasts who arrived at the same score. However, the Baden-Baden decision was aimed at all international federations, not only gymnastics. When the EC predictably failed to come up with a way to preclude ties, they wrote to the IOC that ties were allowed in other sports, and thus should be maintained in gymnastics. The IOC, however, showed gymnastics to be the ‘problem child’ of the IOC when it came to the ex-aequo issue. Csanadi shut down the FIG’s argument when he wrote:

> Although ties are theoretically possible in a few sports other than gymnastics, no cases occurred at the last winter and summer Olympic Games. The only case on record is the men’s relay at the last cross-country skiing championship. On

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703 Arpad Csanadi (Honorary IOC Sports Director), '84th Session of the I.O.C. In Baden-Baden,' Letter to Yuri Titov (FIG President), 7 December 1981.


705 Arpad Csanadi (Honorary IOC Sports Director), Yuri Titov (FIG President), and Max Bangerter (FIG Secretary General), 'Memo on the Meeting between the I.O.C. Honorary Sports Director and the President, Mr Yuri Titov, and the Secretary General, Mr Max Bangerter of the Federation Internationale De Gymnastique,' Memorandum, 3 February 1982, in *International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1982-1983, SD1 1982: D-RM02-GYMNA/006*, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).

706 Yuri Titov (FIG President), 'Case of Ex Aequo at the Gymnastics Competitions at the Olympic Games,' Letter to Arpad Csanadi (Honorary IOC Sports Director), June 1982, in *International Gymnastics Federation: Correspondence 1982-1983, SD1 1982: D-RM02-GYMNA/006*, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
the contrary, ex aequo cases in gymnastics occurred repeatedly at past Olympic
Games and World Championships.\footnote{707} In the ten years between 1972 and 1982, the FIG awarded 22 ties, eight of which were at the three Olympics of this period, and six of which were in WAG.\footnote{708} However, after this correspondence, there are no following letters or decisions on the matter. Ex aequo rankings continued right into the 1990s, suggesting that no immediate change was made.\footnote{709} However, change was forced upon the FIG following the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. A rule to break tied scores was introduced and has undergone a number of incarnations (for example, the most difficult routine wins, or the totals from the top three events determine the winner). But this rule has only ever been employed at the Olympic Games – the FIG allowed ties to this day at all other events. The Olympic tie-break rule thus continues to be a source of ire for gymnastics fans, who as Titov already pointed out, cannot see why gymnastics cannot consider two athletes perfectly matched if the same can also be true of sprinters, swimmers, and most other athletes whose achievements are quantitatively measured. The IOC, for their part, insist that it is precisely because gymnastics is judged that performances can and should be differentiated.


\footnote{708} Arpad Csanadi (Honorary IOC Sports Director), 'Re: Ex Aequo on Ranking Lists,' Letter to Yuri Titov (FIG President), 18 June 1982.

\footnote{709} Indeed, only two years later at the LA Olympics, four men tied for the silver medal on vault.
**Soviet Emigration**

Meanwhile, as the Soviet Union crumbled, so too did its gymnastics system. Once coaches had been amongst the privileged of society – with one or more gymnasts on the national team, coaches had good salaries, plus 'perks' including cars, housing and international travel. After 1991, coaching was less lucrative. ‘They all moved out of Russia because there was no way to make a living for them,’ asserted Liz Chetkovich, Australian WAG High Performance Manager who employed the first Soviet coach in the West when working for the West Australian Institute of Sport. ‘They were driving taxis, doing all sorts of things.’ So they began to take up coaching offers overseas. While no former-Soviet coach interviewed for this research indicated things were quite so bad at home, the ‘pull’ factors of the lucrative Western coaching model (both financially and in terms of improved chances of making the national team), were significant in the Soviet coaching exodus of the 1990s.

A pioneer, Andrei Rodionenko, was the former head coach of the Soviet national team and one of the first coaches to leave. Out of favour after the Soviet Union’s 1987 world championship loss to Romania, Rodionenko placed an advertisement in *International Gymnast* magazine seeking work. Chetkovich saw it, approached him, and he agreed to move to Perth, Australia. ‘And so he came here, and his wife followed him about a month later I suppose, and then all the programmes around Australia wanted a Russian coach.’ Russian immigrants like Rodionenko found jobs abroad for their friends and Soviet expertise enhanced

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710 Barker-Ruchti, 'Ballerinas and Pixies; and Alexandra Koudinova, interviewed by Georgia Cervin, (Auckland, New Zealand), 2014.
711 Chetkovich, 2014.
712 Ibid.
Western gymnastics organizations. However, those to follow would fit the ‘settler’ model of migration, taking up permanent positions in their new home countries.  

Technical Expertise

Several people pointed to the Soviet influx as a levelling factor in WAG worldwide, both improving Western standards and disadvantaging Russian gymnastics. For instance, Liz Chetkovich observed:

What the Soviet coaches have done is evened the playing field technically. Russia suffered, from ’91 through to probably 2004 because they had a massive sort of vacuum … while they were giving their expertise to someone else they were losing it at the same time. That’s why it took about 12 years for Russia to fall in a heap … they had some gymnasts coming through but they lost a lot of their momentum; they lost funding, they lost their system.

While disadvantaging the former Soviet Union, the emigration of coaches caused significant improvement in gymnastics programmes worldwide. Asked about the extent of international cooperation before the breakdown of the Soviet Union, one former Soviet gymnast and FIG official recalled that in the past climate of Cold War suspicion gymnastics knowledge was a secret; nobody shared their experience or expertise. After 1991, these barriers were broken. The secrets behind the Soviets’ immaculate technique, their conditioning, programming, and organization were shared with the countries to which these experts moved. Observing these movements, Fink exclaimed: ‘Soviet coaches had a huge effect worldwide. There was an immediate increase in quality everywhere in the world where they were’.

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714 Chetkovich, 2014.

715 Hardy Fink, 2014.
Elaborating on how they achieved this, Chetkovich reflected: ‘I think that Soviet emigration allowed other countries to learn the technical things that they didn’t actually know.’

In fact, the common response when asked about the effect of Soviet emigration is recognition of the technical expertise these coaches brought with them. Angela Douglas, a brevet judge and mother of a former international gymnast in New Zealand recalled the changes foreign coaches introduced, in stark contrast to the laissez-faire, have-a-go approach New Zealand had previously taken. ‘The thing that has really stuck in my mind was the conditioning – because nobody did any conditioning. The Russians have made a big difference to the quality. People were trying to do things backwards before.’

It is striking, however, that very few people attribute any country's progress in gymnastics to the immigration of Soviet coaches. It is almost universally acknowledged that they raised the standard of the sport worldwide through their technical expertise. But when everyone improves, few can progress through the rankings. Chetkovich argued that this is why the level of difficulty grew exponentially in the 1990s and 2000s:

> Basically, the difficulty level exploded. I think that has happened because the expertise has spread and many people have been able to get a base level. So they needed something extraordinary to get past the pack. But the pack got bigger and bigger and bigger.

Even the technical contribution of transplanted coaches has left a questionable legacy. They certainly created technically superior gymnasts in countries that had

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716 Chetkovich, 2014.
718 Chetkovich, 2014.
never known elite WAG, but several interviewees noted that they have seldom transferred this knowledge into new coaching systems. Local coaches have not learned from the Soviet immigrants and few Soviet coaches have been willing to contribute to coach education. The results are often successful gymnasts, but not necessarily successful gymnastics programmes. Accordingly, when asked what effect Soviet coaches had on domestic coaches in the countries to which they immigrated, Fink was reluctant to point to any contribution of knowledge.

On balance, I’m having a hard time trying to think of any that are actually good sharers. [Valery] Liukin is probably a super example of a great guy that’s willing to share. Most of them do their own thing and you could learn from watching them, but they didn’t necessarily create systems… Even within the gym, you are the handstand coach, you are this coach. Nobody saw the whole process. I shouldn’t paint them all with the same brush because there are obviously exceptions that were really positive and really shared. But most of them just did their own thing. You could learn from them… maybe. So it wasn’t all positive.\textsuperscript{719}

\textit{Problems With Foreign Coaches}

The introduction of Soviet coaches to Western gymnastics programmes also brought with it a range of other problems. Coaches and employers had different ideas of the job requirements, and cultural differences caused problems when working with children and protective parents in the West. Moreover, Chetkovich described how many Soviet coaches were put into programmes doomed to fail because of the assumption that because coaches came from the Soviet Union, they knew how to do it all.

I think when they came over we considered them to be god-like in a way. And that’s why some of the programmes – not just in Australia, but probably in

\textsuperscript{719} Hardy Fink, 2014.
other cases in the world – they gave them carte blanche to do what they wanted to do. But that wasn’t the best thing for the programmes because they weren’t skilled at all the things we required them to be skilled at in Australia. I can’t speak for the other countries, [only for] our management and all that side of things…

There was a particular problem with the accountability of the job in the West. In the Soviet Union a coach’s mandate was not to produce national team members (although the perks provided the motivation to do so). But in Australia that objective was crucial to the job, and the results had to pay for the coach’s employment – especially under the state institute system, in which the government provides funding to achieve a certain outcome. If that outcome is not met that funding will be redirected elsewhere. ‘My understanding in Russia,’ said Chetkovich, ‘is most of those gym schools would have a pair of coaches with about four kids and they would all bring them to the championships, and if you didn’t make it you didn’t make it. You went back and you tried again’. Fink was more critical:

They just knew one thing: this is how you coach, this is how you produce an athlete. And that’s what they did everyday. We all know but we wouldn’t do it. They did it because they didn’t know anything else. So I think initially, there was a huge rise in countries Soviet coaches went to, but at the same time I think they brought many of the negatives from their background – like the sort of psychological abuse or overtraining – that maybe too many coaches emulated as well. It’s not the only way to success. So we got positives and negatives from it.

Several programmes in Australia, however, were able to mitigate these problems. The mixed staffing approaches adopted by the West Australian Institute of Sport and

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720 Chetkovich, 2014.
721 Ibid.
722 Hardy Fink, 2014.
the Victorian Institute of Sport demonstrated that the contribution of Soviet coaches’ technical knowledge worked best when placed with someone who could negotiate that knowledge in a Western context. Liz Chetkovich observed of other programmes: ‘I saw a lot of times where people assumed that because somebody was from Russia they could manage and run a whole programme. And just about every centre went pear-shaped.’ Instead, what Chetkovich did at WAIS, and Fiona Byrd emulated at VIS, was to place foreign coaches alongside local coaches who could reconcile the requirements to create elite athletes within the cultural norms of Australia. In the US, immigrant coaches were placed alongside Americans when they joined American clubs, and when Soviet coaches later established their own businesses, they were forced to adapt.

A decade later, the effects of this emigration are less potent. ‘The improvements have petered out because many of them have gone into fishing mode,’ claimed Fink. ‘You know, they’ve done it and they’ve done it for 20 years at home and now here another 15 years, and then it’s time to go fishing. So many of them got a little less serious, a little less intense.’

There is less evidence from which to draw conclusions from the coaches’ perspectives. However, some tentative suggestions can be made. One of the interviewees for this thesis indicated how it was ‘pull’ factors which drew her to the West, including job opportunity for both her and her husband to work at the same club, rather than ‘push’ factors driving her away from Russia. And while she revealed she struggled with the foreign culture for the first several years, she has become more like a Westerner in both the way she coaches as well as embracing the

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723 Chetkovich, 2014.
724 Ibid.
725 Hardy Fink, 2014.
local leisure activities. Nonetheless, the interaction of these diasporic coaches reveals a common feeling. At international competitions they meet their friends to socialize nightly, speaking Russian the entire time. A Western friend of such coaches suggested:

To an extent when they’re at international competitions, the Russian coaches from All-Around the world form a tiny little private club. I see still in them, a great deal of pride any time a Russian does well. So when Nastia Liukin won that Olympic gold medal [in 2008], the feeling that I got from the Russian coaches was that they were very proud... they considered her to be Russian. And that that result was also reflected on Russia. \(^\text{726}\)

Furthermore, there is some sentiment that this Soviet gymnastic diaspora opened up a new wave of migration of experts in other sports. ‘Actually them coming out of Russia opened the floodgates because then we got coaches from East Germany for rowing, or Bulgaria for weightlifting,’ observed a WAG administrator who had recruited Soviet coaches.

*Sports Systems*

Soviet coaches not only brought with them technical expertise, but a very specific idea of an effective gymnastics system. In Australia, this built on the emerging institute system, which had already seen Australia rise through the international rankings, and was already based on the Eastern bloc model. For example, Chetkovich recalled how quickly Rodionenko had been able to assess and improve the WA system: ‘As soon as Andrei came he said: “you need another coach,” so he understood that we needed coaches and successive generations’. \(^\text{727}\)

\(^{726}\) Interview with an administrator of an Australian gymnastics programme, 2014.  
\(^{727}\) Chetkovich, 2014.
Indeed, the employment of Rodionenko saw WAIS emerge as a self-sufficient gymnastics programme, producing elite gymnasts without the need to send young girls to live in Canberra to reach this level.

The gymnastics public here was pretty excited that we had a Russian coach; that we had Andrei. That was a very big coup for us. The national gymnastics federation at the time didn’t want me to do that, because they just wanted us to send our kids to Canberra. So what it did was it set us up in opposition to Ju Ping [head coach at the AIS in Canberra]. She thought that we would just keep sending kids to her.\textsuperscript{728}

Fink also commented on this presumption of centralization, which Australia was not the only country to misinterpret.

A lot of countries are suffering from trying to do a pure centralization model, to this day. I think the idea of centralization for many of us, including Canada, was that the team lives together, works together, does everything together, in one location. I think that’s a long-term disaster because you take the incentive away from the coaches everywhere else in the country and the role models leave those clubs… I think that was Australia’s problem a little bit.\textsuperscript{729}

Fink elaborated that despite common belief in the West, the Soviet model of a centralized sports system was never intended to be a full-time, permanent situation. It referred rather to frequent meetings in a centralized training centre. In the Soviet Union it meant that the top athletes and coaches would come together monthly at Round Lake to train, learn from one another, and stay competitive. When they returned home, advice from the head coach would guide their training until the next meeting. ‘And that’s what the United States is doing now, and it’s hugely

\textsuperscript{728} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{729} Hardy Fink, 2014.
successful,’ observed Fink.\textsuperscript{730}

Indeed, building on its success during the 1980s, and the changes brought in with the Károlyis, the USA continued on its meteoric rise through the gymnastics world. First, Kim Zmeskal, a Károlyi protégé, became America’s first woman to win gold in the prestigious All-Around competition at the World Championships. She did this in both 1990 and 1991. By 1992, however, a teammate was gaining the attention of the gymnastics world. Shannon Miller was the only member of the 1992 Olympic team who was not coached by the Károlyis. Her coaches were Steve Nunno and Peggy Liddick; the former had worked under Károlyi for some time, and the latter would go on to become head coach for Australia.\textsuperscript{731} The work of this 1992 cohort set the stage for American dominance in gymnastics, as they went on to win their first team gold medal on home ground at the Atlanta Olympics four years later.

Questioned about America’s rise in the 1990s, Liz Chetkovich implied that gymnastics success is more than a matter of performance on the competition floor: the result of years of building a reputation:

\begin{quote}
In 1992, when Shannon came second All-Around to Gutsu, all of a sudden people were sitting up because she looked as good as them! Whereas in 88 you had Phoebe Mills, Rhonda Faehn, those ones – and you’d had Mary Lou Retton who came out of left field – but they didn’t look like the Russians. They didn’t kind of belong. They had a couple of individuals getting in there but they still lacked in elegance. By ’92, with Shannon Miller coming in, all of a sudden, if she’d been wearing a Russian leotard, apart from a little bit of style stuff, you would have said technically she looked like a Russian. But actually she had two American coaches. And from then on, the team through to ’96 … all of a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{730} Ibid.

sudden they had their own place. They still had their own style but technically they were as good as anyone.\textsuperscript{732}

This notion of building a reputation feeds into Karolyi’s rhetoric of the 1980s. Arguably this is one of the most significant contributions Eastern bloc coaches brought to the West; the conviction that gymnastic success was the result of more than what happened on the competition floor alone. American and Australian understanding of this concept was evidenced in their increasing representation on FIG committees.

Indeed, shifts in gymnastics success mirrored changing power in the FIG. Increasingly the WTC, MTC and EC were composed of members who were not from Eastern Europe. When approached for this research, one Australian former EC member immediately suggested that the FIG and its committees should be examined. From his experience, having international judges and people on the FIG committees was important to improve Australia’s ranking. He asserted: ‘I know other countries who have improved, but then I look at the technical committees and their makeup and I go, “oh I wonder how that happened!” That is a definite factor.’\textsuperscript{733}

Representation within the FIG was indeed changing in the 1990s. At Berger’s departure, American Jackie Fie became WTC President in 1992, although she had been a member since 1976. While a Romanian and a Bulgarian remained WTC members throughout the 1990s, they were joined by Cuban, Swedish and Portuguese representatives. As of 1994, the EC had no members from the Eastern bloc. Kim Dowdell of Australia joined the WTC in 1997, complementing Australia’s increasing success.

\textsuperscript{732} Chetkovich, 2014.
\textsuperscript{733} Interview with a former EC member, 2016.
As Yuri Titov’s Presidential Reports had suggested in the decade earlier, perhaps this diversification was a deliberate initiative to expand gymnastics beyond its traditional Eastern European stronghold. New Zealander Douglas mused:

I think the FIG respected the knowledge of the Soviets, but they tried to include the rest of the world. They didn’t want just Russia forever and ever. They wanted to include other countries. They changed the Code so it gives other countries a little chance.\(^{734}\)

Certainly, significant changes to the Code of Points during the 1990s had a profound effect on the design of gymnastics competitions, compounding the changes prompted by political shifts outside the gymnastics world.

**Conclusion**

While international mobility of players has received significant scholarship, there has been little consideration of how knowledge in the form of coaches moves between nations in tune with geopolitical shifts.\(^{735}\) In addition, ‘globalization’ has been a more common framework than the (post-) Cold War. Although in need of further study, this small sample demonstrates that labour migration in WAG not only traversed the globe, but it also centred on coaches as a direct result of the end of the Cold War (and opening up of channels to leave the Eastern bloc). Further, this migration has seldom been seasonal, and usually permanent. From oral histories as well as personal connections, I have observed that coaches in Australian and New

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\(^{734}\) Douglas, 2014.

Zealand WAG have settled permanently in their new homes, despite the lifelong affiliation with Russia. In such ways, the international labour patterns of WAG warrant deeper analysis than was able to be provided by the small sample of interviews here. Such research could also consider the lived experiences of migrants and those who worked with them, while consideration of other non-professional sports would provide a much better understanding of the post-Cold War Olympic landscape.
Chapter Eight

Swinging Into Action: Influences on FIG Policy in the 1990s

Notwithstanding the increasingly diverse composition of the FIG, much of the change throughout this decade was the result of increased concern about gymnastics’ negative image in the media. While there has been extremely little history written of this era, contemporary writing on WAG unwittingly sheds light on why such changes were employed. Although a ‘dramatization,’ Joan Ryan’s best-selling exposé was a harsh criticism of the sport in the US, arguing that ‘all too often behind the pigtails and mascara is a trail of abuse from parents, coaches, and [US] federation officials – the very people charged with protecting these young athletes.’ 736 Meanwhile the AIS too came under fire in newspapers for abusive coaching methods, which academic Wendy Varney claimed was a problem not specific to the AIS, but situated within the broader culture of WAG itself. 737 Such writing indicated contemporaneous localized criticisms of the sport, which pointed to systematic problems in the sport’s very design. With the benefit of hindsight the link between public relations and significant changes to the international WAG programme made by the FIG becomes apparent. The FIG’s new policies included revised competition formats aimed at better spectator engagement, and updated equipment and rules to remedy accusations over the dangers of the sport. Concurrently, these changes arose as the FIG began to accept the professionalization of sport.

736 Ryan, Little Girls in Pretty Boxes, inside cover.
Public Relations

A decade later than the rest of the Olympic movement, in the 1990s the FIG began to modernize its economic policy. It had suffered financially from its resolute devotion to amateurism, and by the start of the decade, competition costs for the world championships nearly exceeded income. Yet competitions were the main source of income for the FIG.

We must realise, however, that the funds received from TV rights, entries, sponsors etc. must not only cover the event, but also the total FIG budget, allowing us to cover all our expenses, to build the necessary reserves for the future, to be able to support the development of gymnastics in all those countries, which have desperate need of FIG support.738

To remedy the FIG’s financial state, it undertook a number of measures. First, it allowed advertising on leotards.739 Then, in 1996, it partnered with a sports marketing company to improve its income. International Sport and Leisure (ISL) brought television contracts worth over two million US dollars to the FIG, along with two million dollars of sponsorship deals.740 In addition to these private commercial ventures, ISL also secured 4.6 million dollars from the IOC, and a grant to pay for the 1997 world championships in Lausanne, reaping the benefits of the IOC’s earlier professionalization.741 ‘Since the FIG engaged in collaboration with the world-known agent ISL, its financial state has recovered well,’ concluded Titov.742

739 Ibid.
741 Ibid.
742 Ibid.
These financial incentives continued under Titov’s 1996 successor, Bruno Grandi, who emphasized not just competition, but televised competition coverage. ‘We must realise that financial stability is not possible until we offer the television market a technical presentation of gymnastics more in keeping with the expectations of the public and competitive vis-à-vis other sports,’ wrote Grandi in 2000. This also points to the need for gymnastics to continue its promotion of the spectacular, as ‘other sports’ (like skateboarding, snowboarding, and BMX) began to encroach on gymnastics’ acrobatic and flight monopoly in the 1990s. In addition, Grandi sought to revitalize the sport from within, adding financial incentives to improve the gymnasts’ performances and create ‘top-level sporting entertainment’. In the new millennium, cash prizes would now be awarded to medal winners. But these economic shifts within the sport meant little if gymnastics could not reform in other ways too. With better economic policies in order, the FIG still needed to improve viewership to yield the fruits of this reform.

Titov himself had acknowledged that emerging concerns over the entertainment factor of gymnastics were extremely important in the increasingly competitive Olympic market. Preparing for the changes as early as 1992, he explained: ‘Whenever the Executive Committee is introducing new competition formats, it considers the modern tendencies of today’s sports and keeps in mind sport-technique as well as social, financial and economical aspects’.

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744 Ibid., 107.
745 Ibid.
Much of the FIG’s concern was prompted by criticism of gymnastics in the media. After gymnastics was popularized in the 1970s, and propagated by small, young girls in the 1980s, the world had not only taken notice of the sport but also begun to take issue with it. It is possible that the success of American gymnasts in 1984 and thereafter, which brought new media attention to the sport in the US, prompted new scrutiny. The same could be said of Australia where its international improvement was recognised before its costs were questioned. The paralyses and deaths of Mukhina, Gomez, and American Christy Heinrich (who died of anorexia in 1994) provided ammunition against WAG, and the small size and young age of the world’s best gymnasts did little to help. Between serious injuries, and ‘social and psychological problems caused by inordinate, single-minded devotion to this isolating sport,’ gymnastics’ reputation was falling fast. Such was its decline that Dave Anderson, a regular gymnastics’ reporter to the New York Times suggested the IOC should drop WAG entirely. ‘More than any other sport, gymnastics steals a kid’s life… Women’s gymnastics isn’t a sport so much as it is a show and sometimes a sham the Olympics could do without.’ Ryan’s best-selling 1996 exposé on the terrible cost of elite gymnastics, caused widespread outrage at the sport. This last work was particularly hurtful, not only because of its popularity, but because Ryan had interviewed a number of prominent people in the American gymnastics community, and few had realized the inculpation she was planning.

Given such criticisms, the FIG’s concern was understandable. It could not improve its viewership under such perceptions. And although it responded to tackle these issues, it is also clear that it felt these criticisms were unfair representations of

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the sport. For example, in his 1993 report, Michel Leglise, President of the FIG Medical Commission wrote:

This year once again, our sport has not been spared press criticism in the field of health and safety. In the vast majority of cases, however, the articles in question have been provocative and tendentious, providing no evidence, no concrete element and no objective truth. The intention has been not so much to cause damage as to merely write something sensational. These criticisms may hurt us, but they should not discourage us. We should continue to provide explanations, to bring forward concrete elements and to add to public comprehension on the basis of our experience and scientific work.749

Leading the defence against negative media coverage, the FIG Medical Commission introduced ‘Operation Universal Bibliography’. It was a collation of every piece of research on gymnastics, to be used as a reference for rebuttal when required. As they explained: ‘Scientific, objective, factual and rational explanation are certainly the only reasonable response to sensational reporting. Scandal-seeking newspapers all too often base their stories on subjective arguments without scientific foundation.’750

Despite the FIG’s disagreement with the charges against it, negative press coverage added to the FIG’s stresses and encouraged it to make changes. The organization was also under two conflicting pressures from the IOC: first to tighten its scoring procedures in order to meet the stringent demands of Olympic membership, and second, to improve its popularity and bring more public interest to the Games. At times, these two goals did not sit well together, and the negative press did not help. As Titov elaborated: ‘The problem is that in the modern, dynamic

world a spectator has neither time nor interest to dig into the rules and very subjective judging in the way a determined winner might. We need to make some improvements’.751 To counter gymnastics’ threatened place in the Games and its falling public image, increasing gymnastics’ viewership became a key feature of FIG policy in the 1990s. Titov’s successor, Bruno Grandi, explained:

As far as the press, sponsors and sporting public are concerned, we become important only once every four years. This is no longer enough. We must exploit our potential in terms of entertainment and cultural traditions and occupy our rightful place within the Olympic movement.752

To meet these goals, Titov argued the FIG should follow the example set by other sports still under the Olympic umbrella. This meant making the sport more media-friendly through streamlining competition times, modernizing its rules, and encompassing more entertainment value, more drama.753 Foreshadowing significant changes to the Code of Points, Titov outlined the main criticisms against gymnastics that such reform should remedy:

• Judging: Long procedure to have the final mark (discussions and changing of marks)
• Too many judges compared with the amount of competing gymnasts.
• Ex aequo ranking. The same medal is given to several gymnasts.
• Team competition. We are also considered to have a “false” tame event, where individual results are just added up. This impression is specially stressed, since the team does not compete as a team in Competition Ia. [since in the late ‘80s, early ‘90s team members were split between sessions]

This criticism has to be taken very seriously and obliges the FIG to find solution to sort out these points in the very near future.\textsuperscript{754}

The first significant change was the introduction of the ‘new life’ rule that added a new dimension of suspense and answered the call to increase viewership and marketability. Introduced in 1989, the ‘new life’ rule replaced the old competition format, wherein the final score was accrued over several days. Under the new rule, once a gymnast reached the finals she was given a clean slate, and started building her score again from 0: the scores from the qualifying rounds became irrelevant to the final outcome. With ‘new life,’ tension rose and the results were less predictable as the outcome rested on the final competition alone, adding extra drama for audiences, while also making it easier to tune in for the medal-winning performances. FIG sources show that this was an initiative suggested by Canada, Italy and Sweden in 1988, to increase gymnastics’ spectator appeal and improve the lot for gymnasts from smaller countries.\textsuperscript{755} But the WTC’s leader attempted to argue against these suggestions, defending her country’s position at the top of gymnastics by invoking the IOC’s disapproval: if gymnastics already had too many ties, such a format would certainly only lead to more. However, her opinion was heavily outweighed by the Western countries who had suggested this alteration, with a vote of 24 to 14 in favour.\textsuperscript{756} It is notable that such a massive change in format did not go through the EC, nor is it discussed in MTC meetings.

\textsuperscript{754} Ibid.


A second pivotal development was the elimination of the compulsory routines. Such a change not only decreased the length of competitions and alleviated some tedium, it had a profound effect in making the sport more accessible for a wider range of countries. However, summaries of the minutes from the FIG meetings at which these changes were decided, reveal discontent about this reform: they also begin to hint at the growing power of the WTC within the FIG.

Until the 1990s, a gymnastics competition ran over several days and sessions. First were the ‘compulsories’ of competition 1a: all gymnasts performed set routines developed, choreographed and prescribed by the WTC. As these were not extremely difficult, the margin of error between gymnasts was small, and the competition thus relied on perfect execution and was judged very strictly. Moreover, by seeing the same routines performed all day, the judges could easily make comparative assessments of performances, driving the expected standard high and competition close. In competition 1b, gymnasts could perform ‘optional’ routines, entirely created by the gymnasts and their coaches, so long as they met the requirements of the Code, (which might for instance demand the gymnast exhibit two connected acrobatic elements, and two leaps that demonstrate a split position).

In January 1993 the EC voted to drop the compulsory exercises from the MAG and WAG competitions. However, in fairness to the gymnasts preparing for the next Olympics, they were retained until the Atlanta Games in 1996. The EC’s decision had brought clashes within the WTC: a summary of their minutes from a 1993 meeting, published in the same FIG Bulletin as the EC announcement, revealed

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WTC plans to retain compulsories until at least 2001.\textsuperscript{758} Opposed to the EC’s directive, the WTC argued the compulsory routines gave validity to the competition as gymnasts were judged under identical conditions as they performed the same routines.\textsuperscript{759} However the WTC’s opposition was not unanimous: a vote revealed 32 votes were in favour of keeping compulsories, with 28 against keeping them.\textsuperscript{760} But the WTC’s opinion meant little when in May 1994 the vast majority of the FIG General Assembly passed a motion to abolish them.\textsuperscript{761} This overruling saw the WTC determined to be stauncher in their opposition to EC changes later in the decade.

Again, this development can be linked to conflict between the increasingly spectator-oriented demands of modern sport and the traditionalist notions of many FIG members. The latter felt that compulsories guided the development of gymnastics, particularly benefitting nations without strong gymnastics backgrounds and knowledge.\textsuperscript{762} According to MTC chairman Karl Zschocke:

\begin{quote}
The progress in technical development made through the compulsory exercises brought advantages even in learning difficult optional elements. Trainers extended their knowledge and found new connections helpful in the complex training of their gymnasts.\textsuperscript{763}
\end{quote}

Averagely ranked nations could copy the greatest teams’ interpretations of the


\textsuperscript{760} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{762} Ibid., 129.

\textsuperscript{763} Ibid.
routines to improve their own standing. In optional routines such imitation and comparison would be much more difficult.

But opposing that argument were those who wanted gymnastics to become a more progressive, media-friendly twenty-first century sport. Some considered compulsories to be too difficult and lacking in basic elements,\textsuperscript{764} keeping the top nations at the top and failing to develop gymnastics for others. Moreover, without compulsories, coaches imagined spending more time to create better optional routines. In terms of appeal to spectators, opponents argued compulsories were repetitive, boring and difficult to market.\textsuperscript{765}

The rhetoric against the loss of compulsories was imbued with the idea that they existed to protect and assist weaker nations. Ironically, their elimination is what created opportunities for such countries. Every oral history pointed to the removal of compulsories as one of the most significant events in gymnastics’ history. For instance, Chetkovich suggested:

> If we’re looking up to 2000, the biggest change was taking the compulsories out after 96. That levelled the playing field, because compulsories had really kept the lower countries from even playing the game. So by taking them out new people could come in. Even if they didn’t look too fantastic during optionals… before if you couldn’t do the compulsories you couldn’t even get to optionals.\textsuperscript{766}

In place of compulsories, the FIG undertook new initiatives to ensure gymnastics education progressed systematically worldwide. As compulsories were being removed, the FIG Age Group and Academy programmes were being prepared. ‘A possible solution which was proposed at the same Congress [in 1994] would be to

\textsuperscript{764} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{765} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{766} Chetkovich, 2014.
work out a type of compulsory exercise for all age classifications, but actually to apply it up to the juniors only,' suggested Zschocke. ‘In other words, this would be a small matter of working out guidelines and recommendations for the various age groups in the form of training programmes.’ Accordingly, in 1996 the EC approved Canadian Slava Corn’s Age Group development programme. ‘This ambitious mandate will deal with the principles of gymnasts’ growth and maturity, of rhythm, of the frequency and content of training sessions and finally of those programmes reserved for the training of coaches.’ While the Age Group programme is not universally applied, to this day the FIG suggests compulsory routines for gymnasts on an elite pathway.

In conjunction with the Age Group Programme as a conduit to international elite level, the FIG also began its Academy Programme, a system of worldwide coach education. ‘Everyone knows that without good coaches, there are no good gymnasts,’ justified Grandi at the inception of the programme in 2000. One former Olympian and WTC member interviewed for this research lauded the success of the programme: because of the Academy, information that was available in the past to only a few countries in the Eastern bloc became more widely available through the FIG programme. Grandi’s 2000 report elaborated on what the programme hoped to achieve: ‘We have started work on the Gymnastics Academies/Schools Project and on technical information for gymnastics and

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769 'About Age Group Programme: An Overview of the Fig Age Group Development and Competition Programs,' FIG, http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/page/view?id=770.
standard training methodologies in every part of the world.' The courses were based in medicine, biology, pedagogy, biomechanics and psychology, but made specific to a gymnastics context, and in line with the requirements of the Code of Points. Intended to run hand in hand with the Age Group Programme, the innovation was in part a response to the growing criticism surrounding WAG’s child athletes. It also contained the latest research ‘concerning children’s introduction to gymnastics according to general principles related to the principles of growth,’ explained Grandi. ‘The health as well as the full physical and psychological development of our gymnasts, of whatever age, ability level or discipline remains one of our most important priorities.’ At its rollout, the FIG campaigned to its 122 national federations, designed a universal curriculum, and gathered a group of international experts to teach the courses.

**Age Before Beauty**

Despite such initiatives to improve gymnastics’ public image and viewership and its clear consideration of age, the prevalence of young athletes in WAG remained harmful for the sport’s image. ‘All athletes risk injury, but the danger is particularly great for young female gymnasts whose growing bodies are especially vulnerable,’ claimed a *New York Times* article. ‘It’s time for gymnastics to reclaim its standards.’

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womanhood,’ Károlyi was quoted saying to the press.\textsuperscript{775} Worse still, a \textit{New York Times} ‘Sports of the Times’ columnist remarked: ‘At best, women’s gymnastics, which are really teen-age gymnastics, is darling and cute, a recital in agility and flexibility. At worst, it’s a subtle form of child abuse.’\textsuperscript{776} Clearly the FIG’s concerns over its image were well placed. And age was one of the foremost areas of criticism.\textsuperscript{777}

Since 1981 the minimum age limit for international competition had been stationary at 15. However, amidst growing criticism\textsuperscript{778} of gymnastics as a sport for little girls, the WTC began talk of increasing the age limit again in the 1990s. Somehow, for the last decade, a 15 year old had been eligible for both senior and junior international competition. ‘In the opinion of the WTC, this is incorrect,’ wrote its president, Jackie Fie.\textsuperscript{779} Addressing this oversight, in April 1994 the WTC proposed making junior competitions open to 13-15 year olds (where previously they had been open to 12 year olds), and moving the senior age minimum to 16, with the caveat that gymnasts could compete at 15 at the qualifying competition in the year

\textsuperscript{776} Anderson, 'Just Let Those Kids Be Kids.'
before the Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{780} This change was to come into effect in January 1997.\textsuperscript{781} The wider assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of the alteration to junior rules (with 60 votes in favour), while 44 were in favour of modifying the age requirement for seniors to 16, with 16 votes against it.\textsuperscript{782}

Rather than evidence of leading reform however, the WTC’s vote was more reactionary: it was a response to a trend already established in WAG, which had seen the average age begin to rise again. At the 1994 World Championships, with 88 gymnasts from 33 countries, the average age of the top gymnasts who reached the All-Around final was 16.72.\textsuperscript{783} As such, codifying this trend was not only of questionable effectiveness, but it suggests that rather than drastically changing practices in WAG, raising the minimum age was more of a public relations manoeuvre than anything else.

\textbf{Adapting the Apparatus}

Similarly, changes in equipment can also be interpreted as top-down responses to trends already established by gymnastics practitioners: the FIG codifying and enabling practices that had already become standard amongst coaches and gymnasts. For instance, one of the most influential changes was the widening of the distance between the asymmetric bars, which allowed gymnasts to swing from the high bar without hitting the low bar. The FIG’s reasoning, however, was tied up with the size of gymnasts – a symptom of the increasing age. 'Initially we were not in favour of a

\textsuperscript{780} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{781} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{783} Ibid., 107.
large increase in width,’ Fie wrote in April 1994. ‘However, we are in favour of the taller gymnasts having equal opportunity to perform certain elements and connections with good technical quality.’ At the 1994 World Championships in Brisbane, the WTC raised the bars by 5cm, and allowed the rails to be moved to 150cm apart. Again invoking the notion of responding to the changing demographic in WAG, it announced: ‘This was done in the best interests of the taller gymnasts, who are disadvantaged in their technical performance as compared to the smaller gymnasts.’

This change not only responded to the changing size and age of gymnasts, it also promoted innovation and increased difficulty. The widening of the bars allowed gymnasts to increase the radius of their swing, generating greater momentum to perform larger skills. A number of release elements from men’s high bar (where a gymnast releases the bar, performs some kind of somersault and regrasps the same bar) were transplanted to WAG. While women had occasionally performed release skills such as the tkachev, jaeger and gienger, these release moves and more difficult variations of them became more common in the 1990s. As the WTC observed: ‘The wider setting better accommodates the technical performance of the taller gymnasts and several new elements being performed by these athletes.’

With the increasing level of difficulty, the safety features of the equipment also needed to be updated, and again this evolution was influenced by the desire to improve gymnastics’ image. In 1997 the mats underneath the apparatus became

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785 Ibid.
787 Ibid., 144.
thicker, moving from a requirement of 12cm to 20cm of dense foam – congruently the bars and beam were raised in height to correspond with the increased mat height. In addition, safety mats of 10cm were also allowed for landings – another increase in the density of padding. Thus while the increasing difficulty in skills of the 1990s was earlier attributed to the spread of Soviet knowledge, it must also be recognized that changes in equipment decreased the risk of harm when performing more difficult manoeuvres, and as such, they became more commonplace.

On vault, these changes were compounded by the addition of mats around the springboard to address the growing popularity of (and risk of injury from) the Yurchenko vault. Where it had once been a mere suggestion after Gomez’ injury, the use of a safety collar around the back and side of the springboard became a requirement, and it also became mandatory for competition hosts to supply a hand mat in a contrasting colour in front of the springboard. Six months later, the vaulting horse was also raised to stand at 125cm to correspond with the increased mat level and gymnasts’ height. This extra height allowed gymnasts to propel themselves into their second salto from a higher surface, opening up women’s vault to new possibilities of more complex somersaulting. In light of this 5cm increase in height only in late 1997, the accidental setting of the vault to the old height of 120cm at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 seems less of a fiasco than it was portrayed at the time. Unfair though it was, many gymnasts would have been practising on the regulation 120cm vaulting horse until only two years before the Olympics.

Nonetheless, by 1998 there was already discussion of a universal vaulting table to replace the old horse, and go hand in hand with the idealistic universal Code that new FIG President Bruno Grandi was planning. This new apparatus would not need to be changed between men and women, and the redesign would allow the FIG to address some of the risks and injuries caused by new vaulting styles, particularly the now ubiquitous Yurchenko. A wider, softer surface was suggested to mitigate the risk if the gymnast miscalculated the location of the apparatus or crashed into it, and after testing, this change came into force in 2000. All these equipment changes reflect the on-going contradictory nature of FIG policy. On the one hand it bemoaned the rise of difficulty at the expense of artistry; on the other, it created equipment that facilitated this very trend.

**Aesthetics and Acrobatization**

Amidst these changes there was concern, as ever, for the rising difficulty levels equating with increased acrobatization. At the start of the decade, Berger despaired: ‘We still consider it necessary to further increase the value of gymnastic elements and generally put them on equal footing with acrobatics.’ It is interesting this constant concern sees difficulty as synonymous with acrobatics, and places it at odds with non-acrobatic skills (such as leaps and turns, holds, and other such elements not involving saltos). The separate term for ‘acrobatics’ implies that it is separate from true ‘gymnastic’ elements. Moreover, it implies that the difficulty of completing an

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791 Until this time, men and women used the same vaulting horse although men traversed it lengthways at 135cm while women did so widthways at 125cm.


acrobatic feat is greater than performing a gymnastic element to the highest level of execution. These understandings of the acrobatic/gymnastic and difficulty/execution dichotomies underpin the concerns of the FIG, which is still plagued by these issues.\(^{794}\) In these dichotomies, both the terms ‘gymnastics’ and ‘execution’ could be replaced with the ever-subjective term ‘artistry’. For example, in 1990, Berger wrote: ‘…we hope to obstruct the still noticeable tendency to overstate the purely acrobatic element at the expense of the aesthetic aspect of movement, harmony and elegance, all of which are indispensable in women’s gymnastics’ .\(^{795}\)

These on-going fears are reminiscent of David Best’s work on the philosophy of sport, where he argued that sports can be classified into two categories: purposive sports, in which speed, distance, or accumulation of goals creates a winner, and aesthetic sports, in which how the movement is performed is the deciding factor (in line with prescribed expectations of the ideal skill).\(^{796}\) The difference is in the emphasis between getting something done, and how well it is done. Here it can be seen that gymnastics internalized and embodied these conflicting ideals: in the so-called gymnastic elements, aestheticism was the aim; in acrobatics the purposive aspect takes centre, asking if it is even possible to perform a difficult element.


Ideally these dualities would be reconciled as one, but the complexity of doing so lies at the heart of the WTC’s concerns.

While the main concern remained as ever with the identity of artistic gymnastics, athlete safety was a secondary issue: a by-product of these dichotomies. Berger revealed as much in her 1992 report:

> The trend which has often been seen in the past of over-emphasising the purely acrobatic aspect of the exercises to the detriment of aesthetics must now finally be overcome, for elegance and grace of movement are absolutely indispensable for women’s gymnastics. In addition, as systematic observations and analyses of many competitions have shown that a large number of injuries have resulted from this relatively one-sided orientation, and we certainly want to avoid these in the future.  

As gymnasts continued to push the boundaries of acrobatics, and a greater number of gymnasts were able to demonstrate mastery of increasingly difficult skills, the judging system had lagged behind these developments, despite quadrennial updates. To prevent stagnation and push the sport’s values in a certain direction, each new Code of Points demanded greater difficulty of gymnasts. But by the 1990s, simply performing the required elements for each apparatus was no longer enough to be judged from 10; rather, new requirements saw gymnasts judged from only 9.0; the remaining point needed to be achieved by performing bonus elements and connections.  This conceptual division of a routine acknowledging the components of difficulty and execution not only points to the purposive/aesthetic divide, it was

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also the first step toward the post-10 Code.

**A Perfect Storm: Abandoning the 10**

Fink had been working on the open-ended, post-10 scoring system with several aims since the early 1990s. The first goal was to decentralize the judging panel’s control through separating the components of the score, secondly to do this by recognizing and separating difficulty and execution, and thirdly to remove the ceiling on scores keeping rankings so close together. And it was intended that in doing so, along with a library of elements ever performed and envisioned with their assigned values, it would be the final, permanent Code of Points.

But true to form, the FIG was reluctant to break from tradition until the 2004 Olympic Games forced its hand, and the new, post-10 Code was introduced in 2006 as a way to improve public relations. Although in 2014 Kerr detailed the introduction of the new, open-ended system in 2006, the use of FIG Bulletins here indicates how these changes were afoot an entire decade before their implementation.\(^{799}\) The 2004 Games saw a number of scoring controversies including the MAG All-Around bronze medallist having his score miscalculated by 0.10, at a cost of the gold medal, as well as the obscure scores given in the men’s high bar final, which did little to impress fans of crowd favourite Alexei Nemov. With its credibility shattered, the FIG returned to Fink for help with rewriting the rules. He recalled:

> The men’s scandals from the 2004 Olympics had a huge effect. That resulted in the forced change of the Code of Points that I’d been trying to promote for the

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20 years before – at least in the separation of execution and difficulty. The men’s judging scandal gave the excuse to suddenly impose it, so the judges couldn’t control both parts of the score.\textsuperscript{800}

However, as Fink indicated, this Code had been twenty years in the making, and its roots lie in the increasingly systematic nature of judging throughout the 1990s, coupled with concerns over viewership. It was during this decade that Titov directed WAG and MAG to move toward a universal Code;\textsuperscript{801} likely a step towards increasing gymnastics’ viewership in making it easier to understand and sell. This was a concern echoed by Grandi four years later:

The formula of competitions and their modification should take into account the needs of the mass media and of sponsors… Our competition formulas are old and lengthy, making full television coverage difficult… The results of competitions are too predictable for the reasons of which we are all well aware…. It will be necessary to make gradual changes to the Codes because:

- They will have to be standardized [between disciplines] in those parts where uniformity is possible
- They will have to become more rational and simplified
- They will have to become a means of guaranteeing sports fairness\textsuperscript{802}

The viewership component of this statement is a particularly interesting reason to have begun seeking a universal Code, as one of the largest criticisms of the post-10 Code is the difficulty audiences have gauging whether something like a 14.65 is a good score; under the 10 system this was much more obvious. Nonetheless, in

\textsuperscript{800} Hardy Fink, 2014.


February 1995, the WTC and MTC held a combined meeting to ‘discuss the foundation of our respective Codes of Points and attempt to make the evaluation of men’s and women’s gymnastics as similar as possible’. Significantly, the aims put forward by Titov for this meeting reflect the changes that would come to gymnastics’ scoring systems in the post-10 era a decade later. Titov challenged the Committees to:

- Reduce the number of judges on a panel
- Learn from sports such as diving and trampolining which already use an A- and B- system
- Separate the Codes into durable and changeable sections (i.e. execution vs. difficulty)
- Leave difficulty open ended upward, rather than devalue elements periodically
- Reduce requirements so that gymnasts can show what they can do and be rewarded for it
- Consider adding the value of the best elements shown rather than specifying difficulties

These challenges would become the key characteristics of the new Code. Under Grandi’s leadership, the FIG sought to bring to life this universal Code, and it was framed in a way to make gymnastics scoring more accessible to the public. A meeting in 1998 further proclaimed the key aims of the evolution of the Code of Points would be:

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804 Ibid.
1) To stabilise the new Code of Points on a longer-term basis in order to reduce costs resulting from the perpetual altering of norms to simplify the work of athletes technicians and judges.

2) To simplify the Code of Points in order to facilitate the reading, memorization, comprehension and interpretation of the Code for the public and media and

3) Insofar as is possible to standardise rules in all the Codes from the various gymnastics disciplines since common elements exist for which common rules are necessary.\textsuperscript{805}

Essentially, the men’s and women’s Codes should be similar, recognizing the shared elements between the disciplines. They should be permanent, rather than rewritten every four years.\textsuperscript{806} And they should be easy for an audience to understand.

Responding to this prescription, and Titov’s earlier imperative of uniformity between disciplines, a 1998 joint meeting of the MTC and WTC in New York began to move towards dividing the difficulty and execution components of gymnastics that had long caused concern in the FIG. One of these changes was the creation of the A and B panels to assess the difficulty and execution respectively. The A panel was to reflect the aggregation of difficulty values for the elements and connections performed with a limit of 10 points; the B panel would assess execution, taking deductions from 10. After incorporating the B score for execution, the final score was still to remain under 10. To maintain the 10, and to make sure execution and aesthetics were prioritized, the committees designed a formula where the A score would be added to twice the B score; the total would then divided by three ((A score


\textsuperscript{806} This is one of the existential problems of the Code however, as within each category of difficulty there are certain elements that may be slightly easier and thus become popular amongst gymnasts. When the rules are rewritten, difficulty values are changed to discourage certain elements (as their difficulty does not reflect their worth), and encourage others which hold greater potential for reward.
+2 \times B \text{ Score}) / 3).

This way of calculating points would also address in some measure the dilemma between difficulty and execution, with the former remaining an important consideration but the latter given greater weight. Indeed, this emphasis on execution was an important feature, as the FIG declared: ‘this formula assures that the important factors of perfect execution and artistry take precedence over difficulty. The display of unmastered difficulty will result in large deductions as well as no credit for the difficulty of the element.’ The division by three, commented Fink, was not really necessary, but was included to maintain the illusion of the perfect 10, pacifying opposition to the new system.

But regardless of the FIG leadership’s enthusiasm and work toward this objective in the 1990s, the Code remained constrained by the 10 until 2006. Despite the compromise to divide by three to keep the 10, there was unrest among the lower ranks of the FIG, particularly from WAG. Indeed, when asked why it took another ten years for these changes to come through, Fink quipped: ‘1998-1999 were the decisive years where all was agreed and all was annulled.’

In December 1998 the FIG released a statement to ‘confirm its intention to maintain the [aforementioned] Code of Points directives that it made and distributed in August.’ This was directed at a dissenting WTC. Although the WTC had been involved in discussing this formula at a joint technical committee meeting the year

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809 Personal correspondence with Hardy Fink, 24 November 2015.
810 Ibid.
before it went to the EC, shortly thereafter the WTC strongly opposed this new direction:

After extensive work and calculation per these directives, there is a legitimate concern among all WTC committee members that this new direction for the Code of Points will not assist the Executive Committee in achieving their objectives and goals:

• A simplified Code for the gymnasts, coaches and judges
• A Code which can be better understood by the media and the spectators
• A more marketable image

with unfamiliar and untraditional scores unrelated to 10 P. It is believed that such a system will extensively lengthen the process of calculation of the A-score, place a much greater separation between the teams and individuals for all but the very top level, eventually erode the base of gymnastics which feeds the system, and moreover, cause escalated safety, stress and injury problems among many others.

Furthermore, argued the WTC, there was not enough time to implement this new system. Gymnasts and coaches were not aware of it, it had not been widely tested, and it would leave the WTC with little more than a year to prepare an entirely new set of rules and values for the Code. Opposition from the WTC, led by its president American Jackie Fie – who had recently seen her country achieve its best results with an Olympic team gold in 1996 – sent the FIG into frantic negotiations as the new Code deadline of 2000 approached. Indeed, Fink recalled that when the EC

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814 Ibid.
voted on separating A and B scores, the four dissenting votes came from the USA (two votes) and Romania and Japan with one vote each; the two top-ranked teams in WAG and the top ranked team in MAG. After the MTC and WTC had met in New York to agree on a new direction, the WTC continued to lead the charge against the new Code, despite the EC voting 17-5 in its favour in November (the US, Romania and Japan had now added China to their group of dissidents). Some of the top men’s countries soon joined the crusade too. Glaringly, the staunchest opposition to the new Code came from those who were achieving the most success under the current system.

In March 1999, Grandi, concerned with the WTC’s failure to fall in line, sent a representative to the WTC meeting to mediate. ‘Hans Jurgen [Grandi’s ambassador] explained that it is OK to have different opinions, but we must accept and follow the decisions of the Executive Committee. Uniformity between disciplines is essential for the new and old disciplines,’ recalled Fie in her summary of the minutes. She argued that the WTC could not accept an EC decision taken without having the opportunity to discuss the proposal and make recommendations to the EC: ‘The WTC feels they have been completely left out of the decision making process.’ She was ignoring the several joint committee meetings at which the new system was discussed. However, as Jurgen reminded the hostile WTC, the directive from the EC allowed the WTC time to test the new Code as they saw fit. Unrelenting, the WTC claimed there was not enough time before the Olympic

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815 Personal correspondence with Fink.
816 Ibid.
818 Ibid.
819 Ibid.
Games to test it, nor in the remaining time after the Olympic Games before it was
due to come into force at the end of the year.\textsuperscript{820} Moreover, the WTC attempted to
reframe their hostility as a necessary reaction against a coup orchestrated by Hardy
Fink. ‘The greatest concern for the WTC is that only the opinion of Hardy Fink was
listened to and adopted, not the opinions of the individual MTC and WTC members
and/or the collective opinion of both artistic gymnastics TCs.’\textsuperscript{821}

Eventually such dissent was able to block this FIG rule change, against
overwhelming support from the EC. As a compromise, by the end of 1999, a
modified version of the aforementioned formula was introduced. Negotiation
between Grandi, the MTC, and the WTC resulted in the decision ‘to maintain a
formula of A-B (start value minus deductions for execution faults) to determine of
the Final Score’.\textsuperscript{822} In another minor concession, the WTC allowed the Start Value
(A score) to be dropped from 9.00 to 8.80 if all requirements were fulfilled; meaning
gymnasts needed to acquire 1.2 bonus points to be judged from 10.\textsuperscript{823} This at least
expanded the possibility of separating gymnasts’ difficulty levels. But after
vehemently shutting down this new Code as a possible solution to the age-old
difficulty/artistry dilemma, it is ironic that the compromise of the new Start Value
came with such a caveat:

\textsuperscript{820} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{821} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{822} Jackie Fie, ‘Women's Technical Committee: Tianjin, Chn, 02-05 October, 1999:
\textsuperscript{823} Fie, ‘Women's Technical Committee, Sydney, September 10-25, 2000, Minutes of the
Meeting of the 00/9: Summary of the Minutes,’ in \textit{FIG Bulletin}, vol. 182, (December
There is concern that the extra 0.20 P. will place an extra burden on the gymnast, by requiring more elements and/or connections and taking valuable time away from the opportunity for artistic choreography.\textsuperscript{824}

Despite these on-going consultations, planning, negotiation and final decisions, a petition supporting the new Code was distributed at the 1999 world championships, which received overwhelming support from the federations. But the WTC’s work was done; going against the EC, Grandi bowed to the WTC and the decision was final. ‘He waited his time and after the multiple MAG judging scandals in Athens, he forced the change,’ observed Fink.\textsuperscript{825}

In the wider context of international sport, the attempted changes at this time are unsurprising. As always, gymnastics was threatened in a growing Olympic movement, particularly as popular extreme sports began to organize and encroach on gymnastics’ acrobatic monopoly. It also comes as no surprise in the context of tightening rules and regulations in sports. Every chapter has revealed the FIG looking to make its rules more objective, and this was yet another evolution of such efforts. Moreover, it was around the same time as the IOC had its own corruption scandal, and the winds must have been blowing in the lead up to the Salt Lake City shakedown.\textsuperscript{826} The IOC was by no means alone in the way it did business while, within gymnastics, Fink’s proposed new system would potentially unmask, or at least, stop shielding some of the shadier practices at the top of international

\begin{footnotes}
\item[824] Ibid.
\item[825] Personal correspondence with Fink.
\end{footnotes}
gymnastics. While there is little hard evidence of any particular incidents, it is difficult to ignore the fact that those in control of gymnastics were those who won.

Judging

Throughout these fifty years, a common thread in of most of the FIG changes was concern over the fallibility of judges. Indeed, the idealistic new Code was in part predicated on tackling judging issues. Which raises the question: Just how political and biased was the judging?

On one hand, scheming to amass public pressure on the judges certainly played a role in determining scores. For instance, at the 1991 Indianapolis world championships, ‘the local press – apparently in association with the US trainer, B. Károlyi – attempted to exercise open psychological pressure by directing gross attacks, abuse and insults towards all judges,’ accused Ellen Berger in an official report.827 On the other hand, judging deficiencies were not always the result of audience pressure, nor human error. At the 1996 Olympic Games alone, three sanctions were issued in WAG to deal with unethical judges.828

Building on the work of the previous decade, which had seen the FIG partnership with Longines provide computer-aided refereeing, in the 1990s the FIG sought to quantify judges further, classifying them in various orders in the never-ending quest to eliminate inconsistent judging.829 The FIG developed a Judge Objectivity Evaluation (JOE) system, which analysed the scores a judge gave against

her peers to determine how fair her scores were. Developed in the US and implemented by the WTC at Fie’s behest, the JOE measured adherence to the Code of Points as well as a judge’s correct ranking of gymnasts; doing so over a period of several competitions could identify deficient judging. Titov proclaimed: ‘… the WTC used the opportunity provided by computer techniques to obtain objective analyses of judges’ awards in order to uncover discrepancies in good time, as well as cases of discrimination on the part of individual judges.’ Since we started to analyse the work of the judges with the JOE-Programme, the judging has become significantly better. The World Championships in Birmingham (1993) were judged the best ever,’ justified Fie, laying the foundation for her future chairmanship of the WTC. Even Berger added her support to the JOE system, boasting ‘This new system makes it possible to discover at any time – with immediate effect – when judges deviate in either direction from established standards in evaluating a competition.’ However, measuring judges against their peers was precisely the group thinking that had led to Comaneci’s 10s in the 1970s.

To an extent the conflict of interest on judging panels was also addressed, with particular reference to those who held official positions at the FIG. ‘The tendencies of weak or biased judging had to be stopped,’ wrote Titov in his 1992

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report, ‘and this is why we introduced the new system [of removing] our TC members from active judging and using them to control the activity and the standard of judging’.834 After the 1990 Congress, it was decided that members of the WTC could not serve as chief judges on the apparatus panels.835 Moreover, the chairman, first vice-chairman and secretary would not serve on any apparatus panel, but instead would form a jury for appeal, in the case of unfair scoring from the apparatus panels. The other WTC members formed a ‘control brigade,’ appointed to supervise the work of judging panels on each apparatus ‘to prevent manipulation of any kind’.836

Although each decade has demonstrated the FIG’s modification of judging rules, the changes of the 1990s must be considered in their context. Perhaps they were simply the next evolution of previous judging arrangements. But it is also noteworthy that these changes arose in the new geographic arrangements of the post-Cold War world, in which there were many more countries attempting to fix scores, as oral histories suggested. In the 1980s it had been established that having WTC members judge could lead to questionable decisions, like with Comaneci at the 1980 Games, but removing them from panels was not employed for another decade. Adding the JOE system was an evolution that encompassed technological innovation, as well as reflecting the American-led WTC’s new push for transparency, in the context of increasingly bad public relations for WAG. Such

836 Ibid.
changes, while evolutionary, are also highly reflective of conditions in the aftermath of the Cold War.

Doping Gymnasts And Dodging Age-Rules: The Inconsistent Police Work of The FIG

With tighter precautions against biased judging, other forms of unfair advantage arose. In a sport marked by its clean history, gymnastics’ first positive doping test was at the world championships in 1994. The next, most prominent incident was at the 2000 Olympics, although in gymnastics lore this was unintentional doping. However, aside from the subjectivity of the sport, the most common form of cheating in WAG was not doping, but age falsification in response to the changing age rules.

FIG records show that North Korea was one of the first countries found guilty of this offence, with repeated false declarations of Kim Gwang-Suk’s age. Gwang-Suk was uneven bars champion at the 1991 world championships, and had participated in the world championships in 1989, 1991, and the Barcelona Olympics of 1992. Yet, at each of these competitions her age had been listed as 15 – the minimum age limit. Responding to demands for an explanation as to how Gwang-Suk had remained the same age for four years, the People’s Republic of Korea (PRK), provided a birth year of 1975 and ‘regretted the oversight’ in birthdates listed as 1974 and 1976. The FIG remained sceptical: ‘the Executive Committee finds it very hard to believe that Mrs Li Jong-Ae is the only person in the PRK federation

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839 Ibid.
which knew about the real age of Kim Gwang Suk’. As a result, the North Korean WAG team was banned from the 1993 World Championships, although Gwang-Suk was allowed to keep her medals, and the competition results were not changed. Arguably, this should have set a precedent in dealing with such occurrences.

Retrospective evidence suggests more countries engaged in this form of cheating, including China and Romania, although in these cases the rules were upheld to a different standard. In 2010 it emerged that a Chinese gymnast from the bronze medal winning team at the Sydney Olympics had been only 14 years of age at the 2000 Games. A subsequent investigation saw the FIG recommend to the IOC that the gymnast, Dong Fangxiao, and her team be stripped of their medals. The USA was awarded the bronze.

In another case of inconsistent policing, Romania remains free from punishment for age falsifications that spanned two decades. In 2002 it was revealed that the age of 1980s star Daniela Silivas was misrepresented by two years so she could compete as a senior at age 13 at the 1985 world championships. Silivas’ age falsification was the work of the Romanian Gymnastics Federation who had performed the same deception a few years earlier, when Lavinia Agache competed at the 1981 world championships also at 13 years of age. In 1995 and 1996

Ibid.


Károlyi accused her of this at the time, which Simionescu of the WTC denied. Neil Amdur, 'Rift over Underage Gymnasts: Soviet Official Denies Charges Passport
Alexandra Marinescu had her age changed by a year to be eligible for those world championships and Olympics.\textsuperscript{845} Long time leader of the Romanian Gymnastics Federation, Nicolae Vieru, commented on these allegations, admitting to the cheating. ‘Changing the ages was a worldwide practice … we copied this from others’.\textsuperscript{846} Despite this admission, however, no sanctions were passed on Romanian gymnastics. Moreover, the deception extended right to the top of the Romanian Olympic Committee, with its leader Ion Tiriac commenting ‘from the International Gymnastics Federation to all other organizations, this was a practice employed by everybody’.\textsuperscript{847}

This preferential treatment of Romanian gymnastics, members of which have also been prominent in FIG committees, was also seen in the doping scandal of the 2000 Olympics, although the extent of this privilege has remained secret until further details were revealed in the oral histories for this research. At those Games, three Romanian gymnasts were ranked first, second and third in the All-Around competition, a clean sweep in gymnastics’ most prestigious competition. All-Around champion Andreea Raducan, however, was subsequently found guilty of doping, testing positive for the banned substance pseudoephedrine. Prescribed cold medicine by the team doctor, Raducan was cast as the unfortunate victim of a mismanaged team. Moreover, it was framed as a particularly innocent mistake as pseudoephedrine

\textsuperscript{845} ‘Romanian Gymnasts Faked Age to Compete.’
\textsuperscript{846} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{847} Ibid.
was not banned by the FIG at the time, but was banned by the IOC. Uncompromising, the IOC stripped Raducan of her medal, which they re-awarded to teammate, Simona Amanar who had originally placed second in the competition. In the FIG press release it was clear this decision came from the IOC, and that the FIG bore little punitive inclinations towards Raducan:

At a meeting held Sept. 26, 2000, the FIG Executive Committee decided unanimously not to impose any further sanctions on Andrea Raducan. It was felt that the removal of the medal was punishment enough for an athlete who was innocent in this situation.Both the IOC and FIG, however, supported sanctions against the team doctor. But the FIG had turned a blind eye to what appeared to be systematic and state-sponsored doping. While this was not to the same extent as the East German programme, nor was it likely much more than a psychological confidence boosting exercise (rather than some of the harsher chemical enhancements), it was still the administration of banned substances. An FIG EC member was present at the emergency meetings held in Sydney to deal with Raducan’s case. There, said the source, a Romanian leader pleaded for Raducan, arguing that everyone on the team had taken pseudoephedrine; she just got caught because she was the smallest and it had not passed through her body yet. Indeed, Tiriac later made these claims in

850 Ibid.
851 Interview with a former FIG Executive Committee member. 2014.
public. Notwithstanding the questionable performance enhancing characteristics of pseudoephedrine, such public admissions of doping should have disqualified the entire team on the basis of the drug being banned at the time. But alas once again a single gymnast was held responsible for a larger, systematic deception, and Romanian gymnastics avoided further investigation. Clearly there will always be examples of seeking unfair advantage in any sport: how the governing body deals with them, however, reveals important motivations and alliances in the complex organizations. Indeed, such INGOs may be supra-national, but their members and their biases certainly serve national interests from time to time.

**Conclusion**

The 1990s saw the continuation of many of gymnastics’ earlier problems: the endless difficulty/artistry debate, the fallibility of judges, new equipment, new rules and more. But in many ways, this was a decade of enormous change and new challenges. A geographically redefined political world affected gymnastics profoundly. The fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the loss of skills coaches weakened the Eastern bloc domination in WAG, and the outpouring of its experts strengthened gymnastics throughout the West. However, these professionals brought with them a range of challenges to reconcile with their new environments: while their technical contribution is certain, their legacy is questionable. As many nations improved their gymnastics with this new knowledge, aided by FIG initiatives such as the Academy programme, few progressed in their rankings. As a result, achieving great difficulty became the hallmark of a successful programme, one the Code of Points facilitated with the abolition of compulsories and the decrease in start values.

Although it fuelled the difficulty/execution divide, arguably this was a problem the WTC brought on itself, through its stubborn rejection of the proposed universal Code. However, a more positive outcome of the abolition of compulsories, amplified by Soviet emigration was the diversification of the sport. More nations now had a chance to win and new ways to do so. The entry of more countries willing to negotiate initially made it easier to arrange the scores, before increasingly strict monitoring of judges prevailed. Thereafter, age falsification became the primary means of evading the rules in a bid for success, a process not helped by the WTC’s move to increase the minimum age. The FIG's rule changes were driven primarily by the need to revitalize the sport’s image, defending it against increasing criticism with the overall aim of attracting spectators and income and legitimizing the sport’s place in the Olympic programme. However intra-organizational politics impeded the employment of the most drastic changes until the following decade. And as always, the tension between acrobatics and gymnastics continued.
Conclusion

The geopolitical battles between East and West, which were also played out in sports arenas, now fortunately belong to the last century. But we have taken drastic measures to prevent those little arrangements between friends, as we also did in the past.\footnote{Bruno Grandi, 'Before the Sports Press, F.I.G. President Bruno Grandi Explains How Gymnastics Reinforced Its Credibility,' Press Release, 10 February 2016, (Doha, Qatar: FIG).}

In the above press release from 2016, FIG President Bruno Grandi reflected on how the Cold War had affected gymnastics in the twentieth century. The conflict between East and West coloured gymnastics' interactions and development throughout the fifty-year period examined in this thesis. As Grandi alluded to, and as this research has shown, the drive to prove national superiority through sport resulted in score-fixing arrangements throughout this period. However, the same drive and the Western response to it also resulted in the growth of WAG, and women’s engagement with sport in general.

Previously the domain of men, more women began to engage in sport as ‘feminine-appropriate’ sports appeared and were popularized on the Olympic stage. WAG was the poster sport for this movement. As Eastern bloc nations targeted women’s sport for the lack of competition their athletes would face, Western nations were forced to reassess their involvement and support of female athletes. Twenty years after its Olympic debut, WAG began to feel the effects of this newfound interest, particularly after 1972 and 1976, when Korbut and Comaneci captured the world’s imagination.

For the Eastern bloc, such successes not only proved their sporting superiority and gender equality over the West, the gymnasts were also meant to
suggest the freedom of movement, liberation and joy enjoyed by their citizens. Through the gymnasts’ acrobatics, unbound by the laws of gravity or the constraints of adulthood, Western audiences could understand, despite the language barrier, how ‘free’ life in the Eastern bloc was. Meanwhile Western audiences were more interested in hearing about how their favourite Eastern bloc athletes loved the West. Such discourse enabled the gymnasts to be welcome visitors in America and Australia. Despite the disconnect between the Eastern bloc’s intended representation of the gymnasts and how the West interpreted their presence, the gymnasts’ use as diplomatic tools ultimately suited both Eastern bloc and Western leaders. Gymnasts became sporting ambassadors in political negotiations. But just as sport was used to aid in achieving détente, it was also used as a weapon in the following decade when two subsequent Olympic Games were boycotted. The political reasons different countries gave for their boycotts were also a clear example of the suspicion that pervaded this period, denying opponents a chance to host a propaganda-filled Olympics as Adolf Hitler had in Berlin in 1936.

The problems surrounding the Games highlight the importance of viewing the IOC and FIG as INGOS, facilitating relations between the superpowers, and globalizing the sport. Before the 1980s, the Olympic Games were one of the few sites where the powers engaged directly with one another. After the boycotts the IOC increased its political presence, overseeing negotiations for cooperation through sport. In this way the IOC acted not only as a political entity, but also as the leader of world sport, including gymnastics. As this research has shown, many of the changes enforced on WAG by the FIG were actually directives of the IOC. The IOC, constantly threatening gymnastics’ place in the Olympics, had much sway over the smaller, weaker FIG. Concurrently, beneath the FIG were gymnastics’ practitioners:
coaches and gymnasts who led the sport and forced the FIG to respond to the changes they introduced. It becomes clear that throughout this time, the FIG struggled to control the sport between the conflicting influences from above and below. Moreover, its own updates to equipment and rules reveal contradictory and short-sighted policy, often bringing results the FIG would later bemoan. One of the best examples of this is in the continued acrobatization of the sport and associated questions of femininity/masculinity, difficulty and execution.

At the same time, within the FIG there was also a struggle to control the sport, both in terms of national representation on its committees and errant judges who facilitated score-fixing. WAG becomes a history of corrupt judging and efforts to prevent it. The FIG was certainly able to make small improvements through the introduction of greater transparency in its practices, and the aid of computer refereeing. Eventually, however, the innovations were not enough and talk began of rewriting the entire Code of Points. While it seemed a new system would prevail by the late 1990s, power struggles within the FIG allowed the WTC to block the move, much to the dismay of the majority of national federations who had supported a new, open-ended Code. It was only the continually botched scores that finally forced the FIG’s hand, introducing the new Code in 2006. Ten years later, Grandi reflected on this history:

[Gymnastics’ position as one of the top three tier sports] is the fruit of a labor undertaken several years ago in order to assure the credibility of our sport and what I like to call “sportive justice.” Gymnastics is a marvellous sport, but it’s a sport that must be judged. We do not have stopwatches that tell us who wins, nor do we have finish lines that show us who arrives first. Instead, human beings judge the performances and they base their judgments off a Code of points created by human beings. So what does sportive justice mean in a sport judged by humans?
• A clear and coherent Code of Points
• Judges who are honest and competent

[The Code of Points wasn't a small thing! We had the "perfect 10" in Gymnastics, the 10 that made Nadia Comaneci famous 40 years ago. Everyone loved the 10 because it was the symbol of perfection. But the 10 was in fact restrictive, because it did not permit the judges to separate the difficulty level of exercises and the quality of their execution.]

Since this move, gymnastics has finally reclaimed its status as one of the foremost sports on the Olympic roster, paralleled only by swimming and athletics. Although the changes were not the result of a moral effort to clean up gymnastics, the sport’s falling public image in the 1990s was of crucial importance to renewal. In the ebb and flow of popularity, gymnastics’ fell out of favour after the 1980s, when no new stars emerged to the level of Korbut and Comaneci, and instead attention was refocused to cast a critical light on the sport. As Western nations rose to prominence in the 1990s, and the sport’s negative public image brought continued economic decline. The reforms of this decade were largely the result of an effort to improve that image, regain popularity and boost finances.

Part of that reform process was one of the most significant themes of this research, the issue of amateurism and the professionalizing of the Games. The amateur rule began as a class-based exclusion of athletes at the Olympics’ inception. Upon the Soviet Union’s entry to the Olympic Games, the working class was suddenly enjoying much greater representation in the Games, although much to the dismay of Western nations because it was promoted by government. American

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hostile rhetoric was the loudest, before the tide quickly turned against its own system of college scholarships and selection of military athletes. Although it became apparent that the rule was all but redundant, the official professionalization of the Games was slow. Australia was quick to seize upon commercial activities to fund its new AIS programme, and American gymnasts found more opportunities to capitalize on their success in their post athletic careers. In both of these scenarios the effects of globalization were seen, as the Western nations began to base their programmes on foreign sports system and employ foreign coaches to achieve success. However, the FIG remained committed to its traditionalist roots, much to the detriment of the sport’s development, both in terms of visibility and income, right into the new millennium.856

Clearly, the history of WAG is both affected by and reflective of wider socio-economic and political trends. It facilitated women’s involvement in sport in both East and West, while its importance in Olympic competition was heightened by Cold War rivalry, as one of the foremost demonstrations of soft power and national ascendency. Meanwhile, success in WAG followed economic shifts. Eastern bloc nations initially had great advantage due to the system of incentives and rewards bestowed upon successful athletes and coaches. When the West began to professionalize, economic opportunities grew and simultaneously so did their gymnastic success. This trend, long suggested by the careers of American Mary Lou Retton and her cohort, is reinforced by examination of 1990s gymnastics. In the aftermath of the Cold War, opportunities in the former Eastern bloc dried up, and

856 Professionalized gymnastics does not become apparent until after 2000, with World Cup Series and World Championships awarding prize money to top athletes, as well as commercial entertainment format gymnastics such as the televised shows Pro Gymnastics Challenge (USA, 2013) and Tumble (Great Britain, 2014).
many coaches went West in search of better economic prospects. Their movement reflected wider global mobility as a result of the end of the Cold War and improved communication networks. As a result, many Western countries saw marked improvements in their gymnastics abilities, albeit in an increasingly competitive field.

While this thesis has explored the many ways in which the Cold War shaped WAG, the sources it has used offer no new insights into the conflict itself. The archives of both the FIG and the IOC are conspicuously devoid of references to the external political landscape. Visits to state-run and other INGO archives might conceivably reveal alternative sources and, in turn, broader concerns. However, geographically and financially, exploratory pursuit of such sources was impossible. In the process of offering a nuanced understanding of WAG’s own history – which had attracted little previous, and no archival, research – ‘the Cold War’ has been as much a descriptor of time as a geo-political conflict. Any attempt to see this thesis as a starting point for investigation into whether and how WAG impacted the Cold War, would require a different set of sources.

Additionally, within the scope of this research there remain avenues that, for good reasons, have not been taken. For instance, oral histories from people involved in American gymnastics would provide more detail to and understanding of a clearly important aspect of WAG's Cold War history, as would access to the USAG’s archives – neither of which were feasible for this author. Furthermore, the USOC has a committee for Foreign Relations; presumably its records would yield a more

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857 Robert Paul Junior (USOC Director of Communications), Letter to Monique Berlioux (IOC Director), 22 October 1981, in Executive Board of the NOC of the USA: Correspondence- 1950-1988, SD2 1981-1982: D-RM01-ETATU/001, (Lausanne, Switzerland: Olympic Studies Centre).
detailed understanding of the nexus between Olympic sports and politics. Similarly, China was deliberately excluded from this research for both logistical and temporal reasons, but a consideration of this nation in future research would add more nuanced perspectives to understandings of WAG, the Cold War, and sport diplomacy.

Two major suggestions for further research from an international perspective should be borne in mind. One is to expand the history of gymnastics beyond WAG’s borders. Currently, this is where most of the small amount of work on gymnastics is situated, to the detriment of the sport's other disciplines. In particular, Rhythmic Gymnastics’ history has received little attention as it diverged from WAG, becoming a hyper-feminine alternative to WAG concurrent with the latter’s acrobatization. Moreover, MAG has garnered almost no attention from the social sciences and humanities. It was designed on entirely different premises to WAG, and was represented by different geo-political powers in the Olympic Games. Due to the significance placed on MAG by most countries throughout the twentieth century, this paucity is both surprising and concerning. As historian Martin Johnes observed: ‘Its history also matters simply because it mattered to people in the past’. 858

Second, this research has suggested the IOC’s promotion of women’s sports began much earlier than foreseen and was at odds with the public perceptions demonstrated in the second chapter. While it is not surprising that gymnastics received such attention in terms of women’s sport, it does beg further questioning of the IOC’s influence on the gender of other, less traditionally feminine sports, for example events like boxing or weightlifting which were only added to the Olympic

roster for women as recently as 2000. In this respect, I hope to have demonstrated how the study of a particular sport like WAG can have implications for the wider discipline of history, offering new perspectives on old questions of class, gender and international politics.

Looking to the future, there are several recommendations this research can offer. First would be the fully-fledged introduction of the post-10 Code in all its glory. The current system is a compromise bearing resemblance to the WTC’s 1990s concerns. If the original plan to have execution valued at double the weight of difficulty had gone ahead, perhaps the FIG would finally have a solution to its persistent dilemma of merging artistry and execution. Second, with such a Code, there would be the possibility to assess gymnastics within the framework of the gender continuum. As Kane argued, this would challenge the idea that men are inherently more gifted at sports than women, instead suggesting that indeed some men are better than some women, but for the most part sporting ability rests on a continuum in which gender is an irrelevant social construct.859 Working from a truly universal Code, rather than one separated by gender, would not only be beneficial in terms of the IOC 2020 agenda for gender equality, it would also serve to challenge the public perception of all gymnastics as feminine sports.860 However distant, ultimately such a plan would enrich the sport of gymnastics, as well as the physical activity of both men and women.

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