

130 YEARS OF FIG

LETTER FROM FIG PRESIDENT PROF. BRUNO GRANDI

Dear Friends of Gymnastics,

On the 23rd of July, 2011, the international gymnastics community has celebrated the 130th anniversary of the FIG creation. It all started in 1881, in Liege, Belgium.

The founder was a humanist, a visionary man, whose ideal was to bring people together around solidarity, tolerance and well-being, around the gymnastics principles. This man, Nicolas Cupérus, dreamed of gymnastics for all, men or women, from all backgrounds or generations; he knew being active was the only way to long term well-being, and that without well-being no culture or personal development would be possible. Indeed dear friends, health experts will confirm that while your car wears out with mileage, your body wears out and ages prematurely with inactivity.

Today, 130 years later, Cupérus' vision is more than ever appropriate. Physical activity and gymnastics are the cure and answer to many 21st century illnesses: idleness, obesity, unhappiness. All societies and age groups are affected and the effects extend not only to the individuals' performances but also to the health care system reaching huge deficit level.

The FIG global Gymnaestrada which was held in July in the Olympic Capital Lausanne, is a real solution to this malaise. Our 20.000 gymnasts gave us a brilliant answer with their enthusiasm, they delighted us with the quality of their routines, and they cheered us up with the beautiful lesson of life they displayed in Lausanne. I paid tribute to them all.

My dear friends, gymnastics and the FIG have come a long way together. Established in 1881, part of the Olympic movement since day one, our Federation is one of the oldest world sporting associations. In the early days of the FIG, Pierre de Coubertin and our founder Nicolas Cupérus could have crossed path. The former had the distinguished career we know and led the revival of the Olympic Games. The latter shared the same sporting ideal for the purpose of education and health.

There was a difference though! An important one. Coubertin spoke of competitions. Cupérus didn't value individual performance! He valued a sport for all abilities, for all levels, for everyone. The father of the gymnastics community wanted to create a universal movement, gathered around a vision of well-being, physical activity, body language, for all people and all ages. The Spirit of the World Gymnaestrada, gymnastics for all, was born in 1881 from the FIG founder's original quest. Cupérus had to abandon his project and bow down to those in favour of a competitive gymnastics. He did win posthumously when in 1953 Johannes Heinrich François Sommer, one of his loyal successors, organised the first World Gymnaestrada in Rotterdam.

Today, Gymnastics is one of the most important sports of the Olympic programme. Thanks to the artistic disciplines, we have a tremendous TV coverage the world over. But this success is not for ever. We must pay attention to the future of our sport.

I recently invited all the technicians to attend a Symposium dedicated to the Code of Points of all of our 6 competitive disciplines, in order to evaluate the positioning and the potential development of our sport. The more seasoned among us remember back to the first Code. A twelve-page opus crafted by Gander, Lapalu and Hentges, it gave structure to Men's Artistic Gymnastics and mapped out judging in three distinct categories: difficulty, combination and execution. That was back in 1949.

Today, the Code reaches out to cover all FIG disciplines; it governs everything, infiltrating gymnastics like a metastasis that spreads and traps the sport in its deadly net. Originally created to serve the

development of our sport, the Code has mutated into a time bomb that we are wholly unable to contain. Worse, it is a pitfall to judges and gymnasts alike, and creates situations that are often impossible to navigate. Remember Athens!

The time has come for us, the technicians, judges and leaders in sport, to gather round a single table and revisit the Code; to re-equip our discipline with the structure and spirit originally inherent to it. This is the endgame of the FIG Symposiums for Rhythmic Gymnastics in Zurich (SUI) at the end of April, for Artistic and Trampoline in mid-June and for Aerobic and Acrobatic in September. Simplify the Codes; we all agree on this point. Keep in mind the essence of Roman law, the first legal system in the history of Man and which is still active today. According to our predecessors, excessive detail is what dilutes and suffocates justice. Too many laws annihilate law itself!

Starting in 2005, we took successful steps toward standardising our Codes; a commendable action, to be sure, but a far cry from being enough. What we need is complete and unequivocal reform if we hope to have a Code that serves to further develop our sport. We must simplify, not complicate. What is the essential reason for the Code? What is it made to do? What is the meaning of its existence? The answer is found in history, whose most basic message is that in order to move forward into the future, one often needs to take a brief look into the past.

At the 1948 Olympic Games in London, judging in gymnastics was scandalous! Judges were using criteria to evaluate exercises specific only to their own countries. It was a free for all. Such chaos! A Code was then created to clarify and classify criteria to maintain a standardised approach to judging. Unity was finally re-established. A mere twelve pages in 1949 compared to hundreds today, not counting the thousands of symbols that go with them! How can a judge effectively react, evaluate and decide in mere seconds and under the pressure that goes hand in hand with, say, an Olympic Final? Impossible; it is beyond human capacity.

We need a Code, a point of reference, which will bring structure to the evaluations brought by our judges and allow us to employ the Fairbrother system. Only by doing this will we be able to avoid situations such as were experienced in Athens and London. We have the tools, IRCOS for one, which can aid in attributing an accurate technical score if used properly. But we must accept the fact that the Artistic score is largely a product of a more subjective, and certainly human, evaluation. That is the variable in our equation; fallible but not unjust. And if we are to lose ourselves in the nimbus of objectivity, we have reference judges in the wings to set our course straight.

Thank you all for your attention.