

To the Editors:

Once again, I have prepared a post-World Championship analysis of the many problems related to the current World Championship regulations. My analyses this year and last year reveal that the current system is beset with unacceptable problems that negatively affect all countries. A return to the 2005-2021 system with a mid-cycle Open Team World Championship seems the easiest and most palatable solution.

***Note** that this is from a PowerPoint presentation and cannot include commentary, nor can it show the colours, transitions and other aspects of a presentation. The PDF of the presentation as well as the two open letters that I wrote in 2022 are available on request.*

Dear President Watanabe, dear FIG Authorities, dear member Federations,

I was recently invited to make a Zoom presentation regarding the World Championship system. I wrote to you twice during 2022 but the length and tone were much criticized, and the important content was ignored. I am attaching relevant slides from my Zoom presentation for your information. I have again done and am providing the analysis for all to review. What happens for the future is in your hands. I hope that my analysis and observations will provide the necessary clarity for decisions going forward that will benefit the entire gymnastics world.

A Myriad of Problems with the Current Regulations for Artistic Gymnastics World Championships

Virtual Presentation
to the
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Introduction

For the past two years, I have tried to alert the FIG authorities and the member federations that the current World Championship format negatively and permanently impacts the majority of federations and their gymnasts. These are the open letters of 2022.

April 18, 2022 – No more Open Team World Championships – a critical look
November 22, 2022 – FIG's Assault on World Championship Participation

It impacts and damages Federations now and for the future:
Financially
Developmentally
Aspirationally

I will explain how the new system is wrongly justified, terribly flawed, massively unfair, and beset with negative impacts and unintended consequences – quite contrary to the “promises”.

I will argue that the gymnastics world needs and should demand an “Open Team World Championship” at least once every cycle. The most reasonable solution is to return to the system in place from 2005-2021.

Some Historical Background

1979-2003	Open access Team & AA WC --- pre-OG year for all Olympic qualification
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Here is what was: The 2005-2021 WC System – a WC every non-Olympic year
It was a hard-fought compromise solution that worked well for 16 years.

Post-Olympic WC Mid-cycle WC & Pre-Olympic WC	Open access CII & CIII, 4W & 6M per country, 3 per event Open access for all federations - CI, CII & CIII <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Top 24 teams from mid-cycle Worlds ▪ 3W & 3M AA (or specialists) for all other countries
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Here, the decision in 2019 for ‘22 & ‘23; and in 2022 for ‘25, ‘26 & ‘27 WC

Establishment of Continental Team & AA quotas to attend mid-cycle & pre-Olympic WC	
Post-Olympic WC Mid-cycle WC & Pre-Olympic WC	Open access CII & CIII, 3W & 3M per country, 2 per apparatus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 24 M & W Teams from Continental qualification based on quotas ▪ 41 M & 50 W AA from Continental qualification based on quotas ▪ 8 specialists on each apparatus (=80) based on World Cup results

Note: CIa = compulsory; CIb = optional (now CI); CII = AA final; CIII = Apparatus final; CIV = Team final

The rationale for the current WC system

Here, the words of FIG President Morinari Watanabe, to 2018 FIG Congress and/or Council press release of May 2019. (*the Council controls Technical Regulations*)

I believe that each statement is either false or misleading or contrary to logic.

1. “In future, we will have more gymnasts from Africa and Oceania. We cannot continue with the current system of World Championships. We must take countermeasures.” In fact, the “countermeasures” have reduced chances for Africa and Oceania. 30 African and 9 Oceania federations have 1 team allocation, and 2 AA (4W for Africa). Many more have attended in the past and will want to in the future.
2. “The new format will come into force at the 2022 and 2023 Worlds, which will limit the number of participants... This will allow a reduction in the overall duration of the World Championships to 11 days, compared to 15 at the 2018 event, with two training days and two competition days less.” Liverpool revealed that the saving is only 1 competition and 1 training day over a 4-year period because pre-Olympic WC were already 24 teams with 3-days. Competition organization is related to number of gymnasts on the most populated apparatus, not the total number in attendance. It is the 6-days of finals that make World Championships long, not the 4-days of qualification.

3. *“Every national federation, even the smallest, must have a chance to host a World Championships.”* This is pure fantasy. It will and can never happen.
4. *“The format changes that we have adopted will help reduce the length and the costs, help make the competition more thrilling as well as enhance the value of the continental championships.”*
As Liverpool revealed, the time saving is 1 competition day once every four years!!!! The costs for mid-cycle WC participation are slightly lowered but two Continental qualifications massively increase costs and obstacles for all federations. A rational financial decision for poorer federations is to totally ignore the mid-cycle qualification and WC – so much for enhancement; and to focus on the pre-Olympic qualification where the top 8-teams are not obligated to attend – so much for enhancement. Interestingly, in 2023, only Japan WAG chose the option to not enhance the Continental Championships by not attending. It is always thrilling because it is a World Championship. “More thrilling” is the purpose of Finals, not qualification.

The Travesty of Continental Quotas

- This was determined in 2019, without advance notice, based on 2018 results.
 - Due to cost, only 17 non-European teams participated in 2018.
 - Would more have attended had they known this would determine their future opportunities for at least 9 years?
- Quotas were based only on 2018 participation numbers without reference to other relevant factors.
- Many teams better than those qualified are forced to stay at home, because of the quotas.
- In 2023, 7 M&W teams qualified that had not been among the top 24 in the past; and 22 that had been among the top 24 (mid-cycle '06, '10, '14, '18) did not.
- Many legitimately good teams & gymnasts can no longer appear at a WC.
- This was not a discussion item at the FIG Congress where such massive decisions have always been debated.

The Quotas are permanent

- There is no mechanism for change; Would EG or any CU give up spots?
- There is no longer a mechanism for a world ranking.
- There is no process by which a Continent could successfully appeal.

The Travesty of Continental Quotas - cont'd

The whole system is Eurocentric.

It unfairly favours those with economic and geographic privilege,
and in effect, it punishes the rest.

EG	Team quotas for rest of World				
13	11				
	Total	OGU	UAG	PAGU	AGU
MAG	11	1	1	4	5
WAG	11	1	1	5	4

EG		AA quotas for rest of World			
23+1		16 MAG & 25 WAG			
	Total	OGU	UAG	PAGU	AGU
MAG	16	2	2	6	6
WAG	25	2	4	11	8

- Why the huge numerical AA advantage to Europe vs the rest of the World? Most place near the very bottom at WC – about 17W & 13M from Europe below 60th; similar for rest of world.
- Why such a disparity in AA quotas, when almost none (2 of 89 this year) qualify for AA Final?
- Why not base it on membership numbers? – i.e. for Federations with no team, guarantee of 1.

The Travesty of Continental Quotas – cont'd

There are other relevant factors that should have been considered – success, members, numbers attempting to qualify, etc.

MAG Medals – EG vs World with 2018 reference					
2018 World	2018 EG	2022 World	2022 EG	2023 World	2023 EG
13	11	15	9	16	8

Team quotas M – 1.6 EG teams/medal vs. 0.7 teams/medal for world

WAG Medals – EG vs World with 2018 reference					
2018 World	2018 EG	2022 World	2022 EG	2023 World	2023 EG
15	3	13	5	17	1

Team quotas W – 13 EG teams/medal vs. 0.65 teams/medal for world

FIG member federations					
Total	EG	OGU	UAG	PAGU	AGU
160	50	9	30	31	40

Team quotas – 26% of EG federations vs. 10% for rest of world

Teams & AA trying to qualify in Continent - 2023				
	EG teams	World teams	EG AA	World AA
MAG	27	38	77	138
WAG	27	35	95	123

Team quotas – 48% of teams for EG vs. \approx 30% for rest of world

- How can EG with 13 teams & 24 AA be reconciled with 11 teams & 16M/25W AA for the rest?
- How should the 30 federations of Africa react with 1 team & 2M/4W gymnasts forever?
- Many countries have recently been enticed to join FIG. Why are they excluded in advance?

The Travesty of Continental Quotas – cont'd

- There is no satisfactory or fair way to establish Continent based quotas for 24 teams in an ever- changing gymnastics world. Only an open WC can provide a ranking to be used to qualify for the next.
- Permanent quotas can not be acceptable when we know that even two years can be a lifetime in gymnastics.
- There is no process for changing the quotas because there is no such thing as a ranking list for those not within the existing quotas.
- Can a ranking based on Continental scores be used? **NO!** Judging scores, especially for MAG, are not at all comparable across Continental Championships.
 - 2022 - TUR 3 \Rightarrow 11; NZL 21 \Rightarrow X; FIN 24 \Rightarrow X; **CAN 27 \Rightarrow 10**; COL 32 \Rightarrow 23
 - 2023 - TUR 5 \Rightarrow 10; KAZ 7 \Rightarrow 18; NZL 24 \Rightarrow X; **CAN 31 \Rightarrow 4**; BRA 26 \Rightarrow 13
 - 2023 – For PAGU men, only USA would have qualified by these scores.

The Unequal Costs of Continental Qualification

The entire new system from quotas to qualification is Eurocentric. It provides massively unfair and unequal financial, resource and time burdens on non-European federations

Europe	Other Continental Unions
Mostly connected by train	International, even intra-country, train impossible
At destination, train connected to airport	Nearly zero such train-airport connections
Often close enough for team to travel by mini-bus; flights are mostly direct flights	Driving not possible, must fly each person in the delegation; often multiple flight connections
Travel flight time rarely exceeds 4 hours	Travel time often exceeds 24 hours
Many budget airlines	Budget airlines do not exist
Mostly visa free travel	Frequent need to buy visas for delegation
Very little jet lag	Extensive jet-lag = extra hotel days to acclimatize
Relatively low cost to qualify	Enormous cost to qualify
Relatively little additional gymnast stress	Much more stress & interrupted training for gymnasts
Reference: Lisbon-St.Petersburg 3500km	Reference: Vancouver-Beunos Aires; 11000km; Tokyo-Jordan 9500km; Cairo to Capetown 7300km

- For Canada to qualify in BRA 2022 cost \$60000; and again in 2023 COL. I estimate that, on the average, it cost at least \$20000 to try to qualify x 50 teams = \$1million each time. You can do your own calculation.

Everything costs more, is more complicated, and takes longer.

The Unequal Costs of Continental Qualification – cont'd

What are the predictable consequences?

- Of about 60 federations that have traditionally attended with teams, perhaps as many as 30 will stop team gymnastics. New federations will never do so and perhaps also not AA gymnastics. Easiest access is Wcup.
- Without a true ranking or chance to show improvement, many will lose NOC or government funding.
- Local media of all kinds, and thus sponsors, will be less interested.
- Reduction in coaches and judges, clubs and gymnasts.
- Loss of opportunities for judge advancement.
- Enormous cost of money, resources and time for non-Europeans.
- Greater stress on gymnasts – travel, jet-lag, interrupted and sub-optimal training, additional peaking cycle. Is this athlete centered?
- Lost freedom for federations to determine how or if to use Continental Championships and how to allocate national team budgets.

NOTE:

- A 24-team WC with Continental qualification was held in Dortmund in 1994.
- The costs and other problems were so great that it was decided never to do it again. Until now!

The sham of World Cup qualification

- Most believe that the top 8 specialists from the Wcup circuit of 4 competitions (Doha, Cottbus, Cairo, Baku) will qualify for Worlds.
- It is not the top 8; it is the remaining 8 once team & AA qualifiers are removed.

The reality:

- Almost no non-European countries can afford to attend. More so because of the need to provide a judge or be penalized. The 80 specialist spots were allocated to 51 gymnasts in 2022 and 56 in 2023. 34 and 40 were from Europe. For PAGU, the most distant from the Wcups, it was 0 specialists in 2022 and 3 in 2023.
- Top countries with teams don't need to attend and mostly do not bother.
- Almost no one attends 3 or 4 Wcups; 36 of the qualified 80 specialists attended only 1 Wcup; only 4 of 80 gymnasts attended 4 Wcups.
- Gymnasts with zero points can qualify; in 2023, 14 qualified with 0-points placing as low as 39th in a single Wcup. This after not being among the 46 that had at least 1-point – *!!!not in the top 46; and then only 39th in one Wcup, but still qualified!!!*
- Except for a few men from countries with no teams, almost all qualified specialists rank far down and even last place at World Championships.

- This cannot be anyone's idea of a specialist.
- One became an "accidental AA gymnast" by qualifying on 4 apparatus (even with 0-points) and qualified as an AA gymnast for the OG replacing one who had specifically qualified as an AA gymnast for Worlds.

It is not "world"; it is not a "series" if 1-Wcup is OK; it is not "specialist" if 0-points is OK

70 years of changing WC participation

- There have been frequent changes (reductions) in participation numbers over the decades. When AA and Team finals were added, competition days increased.
- When team size was reduced, it often led to the possibility of more countries with teams so that there are more teams but not necessarily greater numbers.
- Since 1997, 4-qualifying days for open WC has always been enough.

Year	Change in numbers
1950-1978	Open access every 4-years mid-cycle - CIa & CIb - Team size 8-6-6
1954	Team size 7-6-5
1979-1995	Open access every 2 years – CIa & CIb – team size 7-6-5
1997-2003	Open access every 2-years – compulsories eliminated – team size 6-5-4
2005-2021	Post-OG = CII & CIII; mid-cycle = Open access; pre-OG = top 24 – team 6-5-4
2018	Team size 5-4-3 <i>(This reduced Men numbers per apparatus by ≈40; Women by ≈20)</i>

It is important to understand that the number of gymnasts registered for a World Championship do not affect the competition scheduling. The critical factor is the number of gymnasts on the most populated apparatus because that will determine the number of needed subdivisions.

The shrinking World Championships

Mid-cycle World Championship - competitors per apparatus										
	V	UB	BB	FX	FX	PH	R	V	PB	HB
2006 Aarhus (6-5-4)	189	194	193	188	227	230	228	230	228	227
2010 Rotterdam	185	187	188	183	244	246	243	244	246	245
2014 Nanning	212	213	216	209	252	254	244	252	253	248
2018 Doha (5-4-3)	194	191	198	191	200	202	194	195	189	197
The Mid-cycle & pre-Olympic World Championships are now the same (24T; 5-4-3)										
2022 Liverpool	144	145	147	148	132	138	128	133	139	138
2023 Antwerp	152	153	152	151	140	140	137	141	140	141

NOTE:

- Men, who always had more teams (avg 48) than women (avg 36) lost about 50% of participating teams and numbers; WAG lost only 33% because the pre-determined number is 24 teams for each.
- MAG lost about 100 gymnasts per apparatus; WAG lost about 50.

The reduction to 24 teams in the mid-cycle World Championship is unnecessary

- The rationale was that only 2 instead of 4 competition days would be necessary. Liverpool revealed that the necessary 10 WAG & 6 MAG subdivisions require three days. The pre-Olympic WC were already down to 24 teams and also require 3-days.
- This saves only 1 competition day, once in a 4-year period, and dramatically proves my point. This “solution” to a mostly non-existent problem has created many real and serious problems. And it has damaged federations financially, developmentally and aspirationally forever.
- 4-days of qualifying competition, once every 4-years, is not unreasonable for two disciplines and in advance of six days of finals competition.
- 4-days of competition can accommodate 14 WAG and 10 MAG subdivisions or as many as 288 per apparatus with subdivision adjustments. 288 has never been reached in our history.
- A little off topic, but interesting in this context, is that the only thing that has continually increased is the number and cost of judges and juries. It takes about 120 judges now to evaluate a world championship. That has more than doubled since pre-1990.

2024 Olympic Qualification

FIG President Morinari Watanabe again:

- *We need a qualification system which everybody can easily understand. Being simple is the best. For the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, we will aim to create a simple qualification system.*
- *It was also crucial for us to implement a qualification system for Paris 2024 that everybody can understand while being fair to the best athletes.*
- It is true that this is much simpler than the 2016 Olympic qualification system.
- But it is 3-year process, with 7 criteria and remains almost impossible for media, and even experts, to understand.
- It involves 29 competitions to complete the full process (15 Continental Championships, 12 World Cups, and 2 World Championships).
- Are 29 competitions necessary? Must it be so very expensive and stressful and prolonged for federations? It was done with 1 or 2 competitions in the past.
 - I still like the pre-2004 system of an Open Team pre-Olympic WC from which all Olympians will qualify under equal conditions for all.
 - But the 2005-2021 WC system might be easiest to return to. An Open Team mid-cycle WC to qualify the top 24 teams to the pre-Olympic WC from which all Olympians will qualify. Only two OG qualifying steps! Simple, understandable, equal conditions for all, cheaper for federations.

A 3-year expensive & convoluted OG qualification process

The new WC system which began in early 2022 is intricately linked to an Olympic qualification that requires 29 competitions for the whole process.

7 criteria	To qualify for WC	OG qualified
1	2022 WC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continental Team qualification based on quotas Top 3 teams from team finals
2-5	2023 WC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continental Team & AA qualification based on quotas Top 8 teams from 2022 are exempt 8 specialist per apparatus from the 4 World Cup events Nine teams: 4-12 from qualification Teams 13-15 – 1 gymnast 8M & 14W AA not on qualified team 1 specialist per apparatus not on team or AA
6	2024 WCup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 specialists on each apparatus
7	2024 Continental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1AA gymnast per continent
---	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host country & Universality spots

- Criteria 6 & 7 are especially harmful and could have been settled in 2023.
- The unequal extra cost, stress and travel cannot be justified and detracts from the equal possibility of focusing on OG preparation following 2023 WC.

Some of the Olympic & WC qualification “quirks”

- Countries not qualified with a team can and did qualify a “team” of 5 gymnasts.
- The top 3-teams from 2022 WC qualified by Team Final results. This differs from Olympic rules and for all other WC & OG qualification. They do not have to attend the pre-Olympic WC.
- The 1st qualified specialist is not often the World Champion. It is whoever remains after team and AA gymnasts are removed. For 2024, we have 1st qualified specialists with rankings of 23rd, 27th and 30th.
- The 2nd and 3rd specialist on each apparatus will likely be someone ranked as low as 40th at the World Championships or did not compete at all. The original concept was that all WC medalists would be guaranteed an Olympic spot.
- Specialist and AA qualified gymnasts are guaranteed by name, but not if they are part of a team; not even if they are World Champion.
- An “accidental AA gymnast” can qualify on all apparatus (even with 0-points) and qualify as an AA gymnast for the OG replacing one who had specifically qualified for WC as an AA gymnast.
- A wise option for many with financial difficulties is to completely ignore the 2022 World Championships and its qualification process.
- A gymnast can compete at Continental Championships in 2024 and qualify for OG, without having attended anything else in 2022 or 2023.
- Unlikely, but a specialist can theoretically compete on one apparatus in one World Cup in 2024 and qualify for OG without having attended anything else.

The illogical post-Olympic WC participation numbers

This is a specialist and AA World Championship

Federations should be able to contest each apparatus if they have the gymnasts.

That is why the 4W & 6M, 3 per apparatus was decided 20 years ago.

The 3W & 3M, 2 per apparatus decision is inexplicable, unjustifiable, and wrong.

- The 3+3, 2 per apparatus is not logical or necessary. There is no justification.
- The qualification has always been able to be run in 2-days. Moreover, two days of Team finals are not needed and therefore it is already 2-days shorter.
- The other two WC are biased in favour of geographically and economically privileged federations, but this WC is biased against the strongest federations and the best gymnasts. Recall the promise of fairness to the best gymnasts.
- The consequences: If a FED has 1AA gymnast, it can have only 1 specialist; if 2 AA, then no specialists; if two specialists on one apparatus, then no AA.
- Only 2-per federation is acceptable for finals, not for qualification before finals.
- Historically, only a few federations attended with 6+4. The average has been 60% of maximum: 2.5W and 3.5M = 6. This is the same total as the new 3+3 but without the negative consequences.
- Men are again disadvantaged as opportunities are cut by 50% vs 25% for WAG.

The illogical post-Olympic WC participation numbers - cont'd

- The numbers per apparatus have always been relatively low compared with team world championships.
- Qualification is always 2-days; and 2-days are saved because no team finals.
- There was no good reason to cut the numbers that will now be lower than 2021.

Post-Olympic World Championship for specialists and all-around gymnasts Number of competitors per apparatus (Delegation maximum 4 WAG & 6 MAG, maximum 3 per apparatus)										
	V	UB	BB	FX	FX	PH	R	V	PB	HB
2005 Melbourne	68	76	79	74	85	91	93	90	87	91
2009 London	107	112	118	113	133	132	126	122	127	127
2013 Antwerp	106	102	111	105	137	149	136	122	142	135
2017 Montreal	103	106	119	111	124	132	113	106	123	124
2021 Kitakyushu	80	82	94	82	102	109	89	98	96	91

The illogical post-Olympic WC participation numbers - cont'd

How is this still a World Championship when dozens of potential medalists are left at home? This cannot be permitted to happen.

- How does a Federation decide which of 4 or 6 events and/or AA to contest?
- Over the previous post-Olympic WC, there have been dozens of examples where 5 or 6 men and 4 women have won different medals.
 - 2013 JPN 1st & 2nd AA, 1st PH, 1st FX; - all different gymnasts
 - 2017 CHN 1st & 2nd AA, 1st PB, 3rd R; - all different gymnasts
 - 2021 CHN 5 different medalists & JPN 4 different medalists.
 - Similarly for WAG: 2013 USA 1st & 2nd AA & another 1st V.
 - There are dozens of examples of finalists in AA and apparatus for many FEDs
- How does a Federation decide which medals or which world champions to sacrifice? Many best gymnasts and best countries are deprived of WC participation. This is unacceptable.

This flawed decision must be reversed before it is put in effect in 2025. There is time to change it. There is no excuse to keep it.

The advantages of attending World Championships

I believe strongly that there is a need for at least one Open Team World Championship each cycle.

I believe that the FIG authorities should commit to provide it and the federations should demand it.

I remember when Canada always placed near the bottom, but nothing was more important than participating in World Championships. It was the motivator behind everything the federation did. Other countries have told me the same. It motivated gymnasts, clubs, coaches, judges, leaders and secured government funding and sponsorships. It helped develop and grow the sport in the country.

The developing and the new federations are excluded in advance and deprived of all aspiration or motivation to advance towards WC. This is a massive disincentive for everything and everyone in Federations that wish future WC participation.

The extra 1-day required for an Open Team World Championship is not a negative. It is an enhancement, a motivation, a benefit, a stimulus for development for countries and the world.

What will we have?

Exclusion and unequal costs & conditions based on mostly non-existent problems

or

Inclusion: for motivation and development of world-wide gymnastics.

What is the issue? Why this system?

It is, in effect, to save 1 competition day in 4 years!

(And, perhaps, for a flawed promise to enhance Continental & Wcup events).

But what are the real costs to the world of this 1-day reduction?

What can be done; and by when.

There is not much time to make changes for the next Olympic cycle.

- The 2025 post-Olympic WC can be changed (reverted) immediately, because it does not add competition or training days for the organizers, and it is not part of Olympic qualification.
- Federations can petition their elected representatives immediately.
- The FIG Executive & authorities could decide to propose change immediately.
- The Council could vote in May 2024. The organizers for 2026 would need to agree to add 1 competition and 1 training day. It is not a problem for 2027.
- Federations are not permitted to make proposals at the 2024 FIG Congress, but the EC can do so.
- The Council could vote in May 2025, but probably too late for 2026 & 2027.
- It could also vote in 2026 as could the Congress but that is too late to affect 2026 and 2027 for Olympic qualification.
- **It must be done in 2024**, otherwise there can probably be no change before 2029. That would mean, the next possible Open Team WC will be in 2030, 12 years after the last full World Championship in 2018. 12 years is a lifetime of irreversible damage to the gymnastics world and to an entire generation of gymnasts and to previously WC aspiring federations that can't begin again.