The Impact Induced by the 2009-2012 FIG Code of Points on Artistic Compositions in Rhythmic Gymnastics Group Events

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Abstract

The gymnasts’ evolutions in group events have always generated top-level technical and artistic shows that were highly appreciated by the audience. The beauty and variety of spatial combinations, the various modes of group movement, the accuracy of hand apparatus trajectories, the complexity of the elements performed by gymnasts in perfect coordination with the music, the unpredictable and plastic effects emerging from this association have all elicited aesthetical emotions. We can witness outstanding performances during which gymnasts, apparatuses and music are in perfect symbiosis, where each associated element has a particular significance. This study emphasizes that the evaluation system of the 2009-2012 FIG Code of Points includes a series of elements that proved to have a negative impact given that coaches decided to organize exercises by laying emphasis on technique and the quality of execution, as they considered that these two elements were the unique determinants of the composition that would allow their gymnasts to be awarded the maximal score. As a result, some of the artistic requirements were taken less into consideration and were usually inappropriately evaluated.

1. Conceptual delimitations and purpose of the research

The choreography of competition exercises represents the dynamic expression of a composition within which the gymnast/gymnasts (group event) and the apparatuses used, together with the musical accompaniment, are in perfect symbiosis, where the technical execution, with its elements of mastery and artistic-motor expressivity, define the gymnastic perfection of a group or of an individual athlete.

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Keywords: artistic composition, choreographic language, artistic requirements;
The choreographic composition is indivisible and gives sense to the whole exercise, being characterized by a unitary motor discourse, with an introduction, a development of the theme and a coherent conclusion; it must present unity and develop a compositional idea by using a wide range of specific actions, where the technique of body movement elements is synchronized with that typical to any hand apparatus, by maximally valorizing the somatic aspect and the psychomotor capacities of the gymnasts involved, and, last but not least, by respecting their age-related particularities and technical preparation level (Abruzzini, 1997). The content of the competitive events must be constructed so that it meets the specific requirements for composition and execution stipulated in the FIG Code of Points. These requirements refer to: (Fig. 1)

![Fig. 1. Specific requirements for composition and execution in group events](image)

The artistic value of the choreographic compositions, although restricted because of the rules imposed by the FIG Code of Points and by the competition area, provides the opportunity to release a potential of individual creation and inspiration. The construction of movement forms and of the relations established among them is based on the search and discovery of perfect harmony between two requirements:

- the first one raises at a high level the technical difficulty;
- the second one gives sense to the entire exercise and creates a final product by using the body, the group and the apparatus in a scenography of forms, in various and logical movements in concert with the sense, without neglecting the importance of the musical accompaniment.

The permanent connection between music and movement imposes, in order to reach harmony and expressivity, the choice of a musical piece that should be expressive and emotional through its very character, through the created atmosphere, with variations, in the suites and rhythms, of its tempos, intensity and acuity. (Roberts, 2002). In the context mentioned, we aim at presenting some details about the statutory requirements referring to the construction of the content for competitive events and also to the choreographic language elements, by specifying that this option does not minimize the value of the other determinants specific to the composition.

1.1. Statutory requirements related to the artistic value of the competition exercises

The artistic value of the competition exercises is represented by: (Fig. 2)
1.2. **Relations among the gymnasts and group work**:

- the typical character of the group exercise is given by each gymnast’s participation in the homogeneous work of the group, in a spirit of cooperation; from this point of view, the composition must be conceived so that the idea of collaboration among the gymnasts is clearly visible throughout the exercise; a group exercise which, in its composition, does not sufficiently stress the principle of cooperation loses its value;
- the relations among the gymnasts and group work, from the compositional point of view, are present in: the exchanges of apparatus and formations, the various modes of travelling and the execution of elements involving a good coordination with the partner. (FIG, 2009)

Modalities of organizing collective work by using *body movement elements*: (Fig. 3 a, b)

A characteristic of the group exercises is the perfect *unity* in the group evolution, under the following aspects:

- technical mastery of the body and of the apparatus handling;
- artistic-motor expressivity of all the performed gymnastic actions;
- perfect synchronization with the musical accompaniment;
- collaboration of the group while performing the motor composition.

The variety in the composition of group exercises is represented by:

- Variety in the choice of elements, achieved through the diversity of actions performed with the apparatus (elements of difficulty, elements of connection) and the diversity of the associated body movement elements or combinations;
- Variety in dynamism, represented by the alternation between the rapid and the slow parts of the exercise;
- Variety in the travelling across the floor area, manifested through the utilization of different directions, trajectories, levels of the height, modes of travelling etc.;
• Variety in the exchange of apparatus, achieved through the utilization of a various content of technical actions with the apparatus, which are associated to the body movement elements or to the technical difficulties, the formations having a spatial organization as diversified as possible;

• Variety in work group organization, achieved by using all the types of collaboration and formation patterns.

The originality of the compositions consists in including, besides the traditional or classical forms, some novel choreographic elements with a suitable musical accompaniment:

• new difficulties and connections coordinated with actions specific to the apparatus, with/without exchanging them;
• new relations and collaborations among the gymnasts and the hand apparatus;
• a new modality of performing the known elements;
• combinations of elements already known by the gymnasts, but performed in a new way;
• a new mode of exchanging the hand apparatus.

Mastery mainly refers to the exercise composition, but also to the gymnasts’ ability to handle the apparatus. The simultaneous and synchronic executions must reflect the group work specificity and must result from the unity of the 5 gymnasts, even when they perform some technical difficulties from different groups of body movements. The execution must present: the same technical perfection and the same coordination of movements; the same manifestation of either the speed or the dynamism change; a perfect and identical coordination of all the gymnasts with the musical accompaniment; the identical unification of the gymnasts’ expressivity and style.

2. Material and method

2.1. Premises

The regulations of the 2009-2012 FIG International Code of Points evolve in the sense of increasing its technical requirements regarding: the number and the value of difficulties performed separately or unitary, simultaneously with the actions of handling the apparatus while being in contact or losing contact with them (e.g.: separate throws or exchanges of apparatus). Although the previous experience has proved that this orientation does not support the event evolution, under the artistic aspect, it has been however accepted, which represents an advantage for objectivizing the jury’ work. We think that this new rule has consequences on the choreographic choices in exercise composition, the economy principle being visibly used in the floor area organization.

2.2. Hypothesis of the research

The appearance of some particular artistic characteristics related to the apparatus utilization and to the collaboration among the gymnasts may determine a relative compositional standardization, by limiting the creation act.

2.3. Methods of research

The present paper represents a constative pedagogic study in which we used the observation method and the recording method. They allowed us to determine some clues that can directly or indirectly influence the mechanisms involved in the execution of artistic compositions in the group event. For this purpose, we conceived a method for the exercise analysis, based on the computerized technique. This method provided us the opportunity to emphasize the most important compositional clues and to quickly analyze the recorded data.
3. Design of the research

3.1. Period, location and subjects of the research

The study was focused on 9 elite teams, the best ones in the world in the group event, in 2011-2012. The recordings were performed on the occasion of three important competitions included in the calendar of the International Gymnastics Federation: Thais – April; Corbeille – May; Kalamata – May.

3.2. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results

The result analysis, after the utilization of some “observation grids”, highlighted a series of elements related to the composition characteristics of the group exercises, such as:

- The composition mechanism is organized around two ideas: the search for originality in the combination of different difficulties and the utilization of risky catches with the loss of visual control, which increase the spectacular character associated to the technical elements. In this sense, we notice:
  - a re-actualization of the work subgroups and of the spatial cascades associated to the technical elements;
  - indirect exchanges of apparatus, which involves a new spatial organization and creates a surprise effect;
  - the choreographic space becomes an important variable of the composition: the formation duration, number, type of organization and work within it allow the identification of the economy-based criteria, for a better “readability” of the technical content in the choreographic production;
  - the passage from one formation to another rather meets the functionality criteria than the purely artistic aspects;
  - an efficientization of the formations, for a better clarity of the group work (in the synchronized, canon, contrastive and rapid succession executions);
  - the elimination of useless movements, the trajectories of gymnasts’ travelling become short and direct, they using more the choreographic drawings under the T, O, V and L shapes;

- The utilization of classical musical pieces is predominant; this kind of music represents a privileged support for the choreographic construction in rhythmic gymnastics:
  - despite the expressive richness and the diversity of some musical pieces, many of them present a metrics with a unique energetic character;
  - we notice the presence of the two currents, but not completely divergent yet, which reflect, on the one hand, the permanent artistic search, and, on the other hand, the valorization of physical and technical performances;
  - the parameters that determine the choice of a musical piece are limited to the technical and rhythmic characteristics; as a matter of fact, many musical pieces considered as monotonous present an interest from the expressive point of view, their choice aiming to produce a positive effect on the jury and to arouse an enthusiastic reaction in the audience.

Tables 1 and 2 present the identification of the formations and the spatial organization of their compositions for the group exercises. We notice the absence of some classical figures and the appearance of some new ones.

| Type of formation | O | T | Y | U | L | I |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Studied groups (2011-2012) | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
### Table 2. Current trends in the world in the spatial organization of competition exercises - group events

| Country | 2 EVENTS APPARATUS | Number of formations | Figures | Lines | Tight formations | Distribution | Centred formations | Travelling formations |
|---------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|-------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| RUS     | 5 clubs            | 9                    | 15      | 7     | 5                | 4            | 11                | 4                    |
| GRE     | 3 ropes + 2 balls  | 8                    | 17      | 2     | 1                | 11           | 6                 | 3                    |
| BLR     | 3 ropes + 2 balls  | 10                   | 18      | 6     | 2                | 14           | 4                 | 5                    |
| ESP     | 5 clubs            | 7                    | 13      | 7     | 5                | 2            | 2                 | 5                    |
| JPN     | 3 ropes + 2 balls  | 10                   | 13      | 5     | 2                | 14           | 11                | 4                    |
| UKR     | 5 clubs            | 9                    | 13      | 7     | 4                | 2            | 10                | 6                    |
| BUL     | 3 ropes + 2 balls  | 12                   | 12      | 4     | 6                | 5            | 9                 | 4                    |
| CHN     | 3 ropes + 2 balls  | 12                   | 14      | 5     | 4                | 4            | 9                 | 3                    |
| ITA     | 5 clubs            | 13                   | 12      | 4     | 6                | 5            | 8                 | 5                    |
|         |                    |                      |         |       |                  |              |                   |                      |

The circle-type formation, the most frequently used in the previous years, is often absent in the exercise compositions presented by some nations, they being currently used rather as a mode of travelling, which meets some requirements related to the utilization of the floor area. The diverse requirements of the Code of Points determine the representative teams to select “useful” work formations, an aspect that leads to a relative choreographic monotony. It seems that other compositional vectors than those regarding the working space will become predominant from now on. Compositions are organized around some sequences (choreographic units gravitating around a major theme), by avoiding the disorder factors, so that the judges can easily recognize the
technical content. Their duration may vary between 12 and 45 seconds. The exercise analysis allowed us to identify four types of sequences: (Table 3)

Table 3. Organization of compositions within some choreographic sequences

| TECHNICAL SEQUENCE |  |
|--------------------|---|
| It contains connections of technical difficulties |  |
| Difficulties performed on the spot or while travelling | They present a tight form with a central distribution |
| They are performed either simultaneously or in rapid succession | All the 5 group gymnasts participate in |
| Duration: 12-27 sec. |  |

| SPATIAL SEQUENCE |  |
|------------------|---|
| Less used; it requires the 5 gymnasts’ synchronization while performing |  |
| Formation that travels on a single length of the floor area | Formation that performs a spatial travelling, with return to the starting point |
| Duration: 12-30 sec. |  |

| RELATIONAL SEQUENCE |  |
|---------------------|---|
| It involves group relations, with or without the exchange of apparatus |  |
| Exchange of roles between 2 or 3 gymnasts during a technical action | Successive exchanges of apparatus |
| Multiple exchanges or combination after the exchange, which presents a technical difficulty value |  |
| Duration: 15-25 sec. |  |

| MUSICAL SEQUENCE |  |
|------------------|---|
| Musical unit with an organizational role |  |
| Classical music | Jazz music | Folk music | Variety music | Film music | Mixed music |
| Duration: 10-12 sec. |  |

4. Conclusions

The old grading system presented a series of negative aspects that determined the coaches to organize the exercises around the technique and the quality of execution, by considering that these two elements represented the unique determinants of the composition that would allow their gymnasts to be awarded the maximal score. In this case, a part of the artistic requirements were less taken into consideration and usually inappropriately evaluated. Thus, in the final result, the technical value prevailed, which is explicable, because the judges’ concentrated attempts to identify the difficulties and the specific requirements ended with a loss of perspective on the composition as a whole. This objective difficulty led to imprecision and mistakes in the gymnasts’ evaluation by the jury.

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