

An Open Letter to the gymnastics community: FIG's Assault on World Championship Participation

Hardy Fink --- November 22, 2022

Dear friends,

The experience of qualifying for a massively restricted-access World Championship in Liverpool has focused ever more criticism on the Technical Regulations that imposed this process now and for the foreseeable future.

In April of this year, I wrote a widely distributed critique and warning of the decision to eliminate the mid-cycle Open Team World Championships and the qualification regulations that went with it. At that time, I wrote for two reasons: I had hoped that the FIG Executive and Council would rethink before voting again for such regulations. And, failing that, I had hoped it would motivate federations to make counterproposals at the Congress. Neither has happened. In fact, the Council voted in late May to impose these rules on the 2025-2026-2027 World Championships without even bothering to await a review on the 2022 World Championship. There was no rush to do this. The issue should responsibly have been postponed for consideration until next year.

This poorly reasoned decision impacted and will continue to impact every federation negatively. It impacts federations financially, it impacts them developmentally, it impacts them aspirationally and it goes against the oft professed gymnast protection, well-being and safe-guarding philosophy.

Only a lack of thorough analysis and debate can explain why the authorities voted for this in 2019/20 and then again in 2022 for implementation in 2025-2026-2027. It also explains why federations have acquiesced to being harmed in this way. But it does not explain why anyone came to think that it would be a good idea to impose this on the world. It "solved" an imaginary non-existent problem and created a litany of very real big problems.

I have added my April critique and warning letter (shaded in green) to the end of this Open Letter. I urge you to read it first, to understand the fuller context and background of what I write today.

In short, I believe that the FIG Technical Regulations related to World Championships that were approved again by the FIG Council in late May have serious negative consequences for the gymnastics world.

Following Liverpool, it is time to state again, and unequivocally, that the combination of the restriction to 24 teams, the implementation of continental quotas and continental qualification along with the current version of World Cup qualification is perhaps the worst ever FIG decision and must be reversed for the future.

A Quick History of World Championships

- From 1950 to 1978, open access World Championships were held every four years. Team sizes changed from 8-8-6 to 7-6-5.
- In part because of problems with 1972 Olympic qualification and the total corruption for 1976, beginning in 1979 and to 2003 (except 1993), open access Team World Championships were held every two years. The pre-Olympic World Championships were used for Olympic qualification to assure equal conditions for all. Beginning in 1997, the compulsory exercises were removed which cut the size of the competition in half. Team sizes started at 7-6-5 but were reduced to 6-5-4 in 1997 that led to additional time savings.
- A variety of temporary formats, that need not be discussed here, were tested in 1992, 1993, twice in 1994, in 1996, and in 2002.
- Beginning in 2005, World Championships were held every non-Olympic year. The post-Olympic World Championships were for all-around gymnasts and for specialists where federations could send four WAG and six MAG gymnasts: maximum three per apparatus. The mid-cycle championships were Open team championships and served to qualify the top 24 teams as well as all around gymnasts and specialists for the pre-Olympic World Championships. The pre-Olympic World Championships provided equal conditions for all as it served for most of Olympic qualification. Over that period, team size went from 6-5-4 in 2006 to 5-4-3 in 2018 which served to increase the number of teams but not the number of competitors.

- 2022-2027: The mid-cycle World Championships (2022 and 2026) are limited to a maximum of 24 teams (5-4-3 team size) and 49 WAG + 40 MAG all around gymnasts (*Can anyone explain why these numbers are different???*) based on Continental quotas and Continental qualification as well as 8-specialists per apparatus based on World Cup rankings. The pre-Olympic World Championships (2023 and 2027) will be restricted to the same qualification numbers and process and would serve for most of Olympic qualification. The post-Olympic World Championship (2025) will be restricted to 3 WAG and 3 MAG gymnasts per country with a maximum of 2 per apparatus.

Everything in this last bullet point is poorly reasoned and must be stopped. It is too late to stop it for 2023. But the gymnastics world cannot permit the implementation of what was decided by the FIG Council in May of this year for the 2025-2027 cycle of World Championships. I will try to demonstrate, with this letter and my April critique, why and how this is a grievous mistake. It must not be accepted by the world gymnastics community.

For all my gymnastics life, the increasing number of federations and gymnasts at World Championships was celebrated. It was a matter of pride. This is the first FIG leadership that seems to think that the way to improve gymnastics is to have less of it. Many new federations have joined FIG and that is a good thing. But will they ever be able to attend a World Championship under these regulations? They will be paid to attend the Congress to vote --- hopefully they will vote for more inclusive regulations.

The unfairness of Continental quotas

Continental quotas have no place in the ever-evolving reality of world gymnastics. In Liverpool, the General Secretary told participants that these quotas were based on past results. It is evident that the only results consulted were from, at the time, the most recent 2018 World Championship in Doha.

The quotas were determined retroactively. No federation knew that Doha would determine their futures for the next 9 years - in 2022, 2023, and now also for 2026 and 2027. Only 17 of 42 WAG and 46 MAG teams in Doha were non-European. Would additional federations have attended had they known? It is not reasonable - I dare say it is insane - to determine Continental quotas based on results from nine years before. We know how much gymnastics changes in nine years. I encourage you to pick almost any team and any 9-year period to see the reality. Think Romania. Think Great Britain. Even two years can be an eternity in gymnastics.

Because of these quotas, teams that were better than qualified teams had to stay home. Over the five previous mid-cycle World Championships many teams had shown the ability to be among the top 24: from Europe 19 WAG & 20 MAG; from Asia 5 WAG & 6 MAG, from America 6 WAG & 6 MAG. In total, of 53 WAG teams, 31 had reached the top 24 and, of 62 MAG teams, 32 had done so. The quota restrictions for the Continents and the restriction to 24 teams are an insult to all and more so because these quotas remain in place until 2027 and beyond. But it is even worse than "until 2027": These quotas are permanent! There will not now be a World Championship to establish a new set of such outrageous quotas. To add teams or gymnasts to any Continent would require a decision to unfairly take them from Europe. Checkmate! Who did this?

The unfairness of Continental qualification

In my April letter, I referred to 1994, the only time this was done for a World Championship and the "promise" never to do it again. And I referred to the cost to federations. And I referred to unequal judging conditions.

Let us look more closely at cost (money, time, stress, resources) to federations with the example of Canada that had to qualify in Rio de Janeiro. The gymnasts train in centres from Vancouver to Halifax - four time-zones and 4500 kilometres apart. The team must assemble in Toronto (5-hour flight from Vancouver, 2 hours from Halifax) because there are no other direct flights to Rio; and then fly 12 hours to Rio. It is worth noting that it is easy to fly directly to England from any large Canadian city (9 hours from Vancouver; 5 hours from Halifax) and assemble there. The total cost for the Canadian delegation to qualify in Rio was more than \$60,000. Will the FIG help pay for this cost that it imposed?

And the rules require this to be done again in 2023, 2026 and 2027. Will the FIG help pay for this ¼-million dollars? I estimate conservatively that 50 teams would wish to qualify at an average cost of \$20,000 (and probably double that for non-Europeans) which would be a collective one million dollars to qualify for each World Championship. Will the FIG help pay this \$1 million that it unthinkingly imposed on the federations for each of the four years? And after those costs, the federations must still pay to attend the World Championships. FIG has made World Championship access a matter of economic privilege.

The travel time, the jet lag, the sub-optimal and interrupted training, the additional stress to peak for another major competition and compete an additional time all add problems for gymnasts. The busy international competition calendar has often been of concern; but seemingly not when the FIG decides that all must compete and pay and travel to one more major competition. This is not gymnast centered and ignores their well-being.

And to make things worse, this has removed the freedom of federations to determine how they want to use Continental Championships - don't go, send only individuals, send a younger or less experienced team, test new routines, etc. And it removed their ability to decide how best to allocate their national team budgets.

Another problem is that Continental qualification does not provide equal conditions for all. Otherwise, the ranking by Continental results could be used rather than a quota system. But we all know that that could not work. As proof, consider this year's results for MAG. The third highest scoring team from qualification was Turkey. New Zealand and Finland would have qualified. Canada that placed 10th (ahead of Turkey) would, at 27th, not have qualified and neither would Colombia.

Interestingly, eight teams that had never been in the top 24 qualified for Liverpool while 21 teams that had been in the top 24 in the past could not be there. What is the true world ranking? It is not the Liverpool results. The situation is similar for many deserving all around gymnasts excluded by unjustifiable Continental quotas.

The sham of Olympic Qualification

To pretend that the 2022 World Championship is a serious part of Olympic Qualification is a sham. Only the top three teams qualify, and they emphatically should not normally need to be qualified two years in advance. Even so, as stated, two years can be an eternity in gymnastics. In 2001, the Belarus MAG team were World Champions. In 2003 they placed 13th and did not qualify for the Olympics. I also wonder how the IOC accepted the top three teams from team finals where the competition rules are different from qualification and Olympic rules. Even the FIG did not accept Continental team finals results for its own World Championship.

Since 2006, the mid-cycle World Championship qualified 24 teams to advance for the Olympic qualification World Championship the following year. Not this time. The majority must follow Continental qualification once again to be among the twenty-four. For some federations with teams, the financially sound and rational decision is to not bother to attend the mid-cycle World Championship with teams and rely on a few specialists.

A look at scheduling

It is worth emphasizing that the total number of competitors is not important for scheduling. It is the number of gymnasts that participate on the most populated apparatus. That is the number that must be planned for.

Below are the numbers for all five previous mid-cycle World Championships and also 2022.

Mid-cycle World Championship - competitors per apparatus												
	NF - National Federations: total = # that actually competed	V	UB	BB	FX	FX	PH	R	V	PB	HB	
2006 Aarhus	W: 50 NF, 223 total, 142 AA ----- M: 59 NF, 279 total, 133 AA	189	194	193	188	227	230	228	230	228	227	
2010 Rotterdam	W: 45 NF, 218 total, 139 AA ----- M: 67 NF, 299 total, 151 AA	185	187	188	183	244	246	243	244	246	245	
2014 Nanning	W: 60 NF, 250 total, 155 AA ----- M: 67 NF, 311 total, 160 AA	212	213	216	209	252	254	244	252	253	248	
2018 Doha	W: 68 NF, 230 total, 144 AA ----- M: 67 NF, 260 total, 115 AA	194	191	198	191	200	202	194	195	189	197	
2022 Liverpool	W: 60 NF, 200* total, 108 AA ----- M: 55 NF, 207* total, 86 AA	144	145	147	148	132	138	128	133	139	138	

* I do not know the exact total numbers for 2022. Theoretically it was 200 and 207, but many spots were not filled (i.e. only 23 WAG teams). Probably it was near 192 and 200.

Note that the numbers of competing gymnasts have stayed quite constant. But, as I pointed out in April, the restriction to 24 teams disproportionately affected MAG that traditionally has more teams. This restriction has, in effect, cut about 50 WAG gymnasts and 100 MAG gymnasts (twice as many as WAG) from each apparatus.

The main advantage of a pre-specified number of participants is that it makes - or should make - the competition organization easier. It should! It did not for Liverpool.

The forcibly reduced numbers were intended to reduce the number of days of qualification from four days for an open World Championship to two days (*2022 Technical Regulations*). A little advance thinking would have shown that it would not be possible to organize the required 10 WAG subdivisions and 6 MAG subdivisions in two days. This was discovered many months in advance but no extra days were added, ostensibly for FIG to save face, since adding a day would have revealed the reduction to 24 teams as excessive and unnecessary.

The "solution" was to put two WAG subdivisions on the last MAG podium day and reduce the length of MAG podium training sessions and rush gymnast preparation contrary to decades of precedent that podium sessions be scheduled exactly as the competition. So, a third qualifying day was needed after all and all three ended after 11pm. Even worse, because of the known time change that weekend, two of those days of qualification effectively ended after midnight for the gymnasts. This is contrary to the Technical Regulations and common sense and gymnast welfare. This scheduling problem is now well known and would exist again in 2023, 2026 and 2027. In short, a third qualification day must be scheduled and was belatedly added into the 2023 Technical Regulations (*TR Version 2.1-Sept. 2022*). And then why not a fourth day to permit a normal open access team World Championship and stop all this nonsense? All this was done to save one day of qualification? Really?

It is not unreasonable to have four qualification days in advance of six days of finals. Four days of qualification can easily accommodate 14 WAG and 10 MAG subdivisions and in extreme situations such as happened in Liverpool, as many as 16 and 12 with a bit of juggling of times. That means as many as 256 WAG and 288 MAG competitors per apparatus if necessary. Those numbers have never been reached in our history. Grouping into rotations of six competitors and/or subdivisions with six WAG rotations have been successfully tried in the past to relieve the schedule and would equalize to 288 for both genders.

The problems of World Cup qualification for specialists

These regulations also provide for the qualification of eight specialists per apparatus from the World Cup Series ranking list. The best three World Cup results from the four designated competitions in Baku, Doha, Cairo and Cottbus were counted. And that is where any thinking about absolutely predictable consequences stopped. The rules permit eight, not only the top eight. That meant that almost anyone who happened to compete at only one World Cup would qualify once the team and all around gymnasts were removed. And indeed that was the case.

Attendance at these World Cups is time-wise, geographically and financially impossible for most countries and aggravated by the need to send or pay for a judge. The World Cup ranking lists reveal that almost every one on the ten lists is from Europe with only an occasional participant from other Continents. On eight apparatus, only one gymnast participated in all four World Cups and very very few participated in three. These lucky gymnasts gravitated to the top of the ranking lists regardless of quality. Most of the world cannot afford to attend. Most who did, competed in only one World Cup. The premise of a World Cup Series ranking list is spurious - it is not "World", it is not a "Series" and not a ranking when quality is secondary and one appearance can suffice. And it is not a qualification when, as happened in WAG, only those at the bottom of the ranking list qualified to be specialists in Liverpool. I am not saying they should not have been there. They should. In fact, I maintain that the mid-cycle World Championship should be open to all. But this World Cup qualification and ranking is frivolous and is massively unfair to the majority of the gymnastics world that cannot afford to attend one, let alone four, World Cups. Those that manage, must pay again to attend the World Championships.

In Liverpool, I predicted that no WAG specialist would be among the top 50. I was almost right. In Olympic order, they placed 79-94-48-89 and many placed in the 140's at the very bottom of the competition and often with scores lower than 10-points. That is not my idea of a specialist.

For MAG, the situation is somewhat different. It is rare for a WAG specialist gymnast to not be from a team. For MAG, it has been the case for decades that top specialists come from countries without a team and so it was again in Liverpool. But, even so, the majority of the eight per apparatus were from the bottom of the ranking list and placed near the bottom in Liverpool.

Current World Cup Series and rankings cannot reasonably nor fairly be used for qualification to a World Championship or to an Olympic Games. This is not acceptable. This must be stopped.

The assault on the post-Olympic World Championships

I mentioned the assault on participation in the post-Olympic World Championship briefly in my April letter. But it demands a closer look. The regulation is much worse than it appears. What have they done and why? WHY?

There have been five such World Championships (2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, 2021). In the discussions nearly twenty years ago, it was clear that, since this is a specialist World Championship (as well as all-around), federations must have the opportunity to contest each apparatus if they so choose. Thus, the decision that I championed at the time and that survived for 16 years was that federations can send a maximum of 4 WAG and 6 MAG gymnasts. The maximum per apparatus was three to permit both all-around and specialist gymnasts and to accommodate qualification for the all-around and apparatus finals of two per federation.

Interestingly, very few federations chose to send full delegations. The average was about 60% of maximum: for WAG 2.5 of the maximum of four; and for MAG, it was 3.5 of the maximum of six. But federations had the opportunity and the choice to decide to send 4 + 6 depending on their circumstances, rather than the 3 + 3 now illogically determined by FIG fiat. WHY?

Here are the numbers per apparatus (*affected sometimes by geographic distance or Covid*).

Post-Olympic World Championship for specialists and all-around gymnasts - # of competitors per apparatus												
Delegation maximum 4 WAG & 6 MAG, maximum 3 per apparatus												
	NF - National Federations; total = # that actually competed	V	UB	BB	FX	FX	PH	R	V	PB	HB	
2005 Melbourne	W: 39 NF, 95 total, 79 AA ---- M: 52 NF, 177 total, 49 AA	68	76	79	74	85	91	93	90	87	91	
2009 London	W: 54 NF, 146 total, 79 AA ---- M: 68 NF, 243 total, 73 AA	107	112	118	113	133	132	126	122	127	127	
2013 Antwerp	W: 57 NF, 134 total, 81 AA ---- M: 71 NF, 259 total, 79 AA	106	102	111	105	137	149	136	122	142	135	
2017 Montreal	W: 54 NF, 146 total, 75 AA ---- M: 67 NF, 239 total, 59 AA	103	106	119	111	124	132	113	106	123	124	
2021 Kitakyushu	W: 42 NF, 112 total, 58 AA ---- M: 54 NF, 188 total, 53 AA	80	82	94	82	102	109	89	98	96	91	

The absolute peak numbers on the most populated apparatus never reached 120 for women or 150 for men even though there were nearly 400 participating gymnasts. Those numbers are easily accommodated in two qualification days. Moreover, these Championships were already two days shorter because, without teams, there are only four days of finals competition.

All this should have been known by those who voted. By what twisted logic did the allocations in the Technical Regulations get reduced to 3 WAG and 3 MAG gymnasts per federation and maximum two per apparatus? Were the real consequences considered? It means, a federation with one specialist on any one apparatus can have only one all around gymnast. A federation with two specialists on any one apparatus can have no all around gymnast. A federation with two all around gymnasts can have no specialists. How is this still a World Championship when perhaps dozens of potential medalists must stay home? This is very very wrong. We have 10 apparatus. Federations must have the opportunity to contest all 10 with their specialists if they have them.

There is no logic in limiting to 3 + 3 and there is both faulty logic and no need to reduce to two per apparatus. As stated earlier, the size of delegations has no impact on the competition organization. It is the number on

the most populated apparatus. Delegation sizes could be 20 per federation and it would make no difference for the organizers except the cost to federations. The 3 + 3 per federation is illogical and cannot be accepted. The maximum 2-per apparatus is nonsensical as explained above and it makes a mockery of the idea of qualifying for AA or apparatus finals where the restriction to two per federation normally goes into effect. How small does the FIG leadership want our World Championships to be? An extrapolation from 2017 predicts that all around and apparatus numbers in 2025 will be significantly lower than those in 2021. Small enough yet?

Note that once again MAG is disadvantaged relative to WAG based on number of apparatus to be contested.

There was no reason and no need to change this. It was a reaction to an uninformed and unexamined false belief that our world championships are too big and too long. It is not true. We do not need to reduce numbers.

This assault on World Championships is massively wrong. What can be done to reverse it?

I maintain that it is not unreasonable for the gymnastics world to demand at least one open access team World Championship every four years. I personally also prefer an open pre-Olympic World Championship that served us well for eight Olympiads, but I doubt that could happen. As a minimum, we must return to the 2005-2021 system of qualifying from an Open World Championship to the pre-Olympic one. It provides equal conditions for both World and Olympic qualification and does not force federations to collectively spend \$1 million to qualify for each World Championship nor does it exclude or financially punish much of the gymnastics world.

The normal process for change is for federations to make proposals to the FIG Congress. Nothing was done at the 2022 Congress. Federations are not permitted to make proposals again until 2026. How did federations - by definition they are the FIG - give up their authority even to make proposals?

The only remaining course of action is to lobby the authorities in advance of the next Council meeting in May of 2023 so that this can be fixed for 2025-2027 and beyond. It is the Council that has responsibility for Technical Regulations. Note that the Council also includes the full Executive Committee where most such issues are generated and which in turn includes the Continental and Technical Presidents who absolutely must be lobbied.

But many other FIG Committees and Commissions have influence and these must also be lobbied - the Men's and Women's Technical Committees, the Competition Commission, the Athlete's Commission, and a number of others that might discuss and influence the issue: the New and Developing Countries Support Commission, the Anti-doping, Medical and Mental Health Commission, and the Safeguarding Commission. If you are not one of the FIG authorities or federation leaders, then encourage your federation leaders to lobby the FIG leaders.

Most importantly, contact the FIG President. Our long history has demonstrated repeatedly, that whatever a President wants or endorses, he gets. He wanted this. He got it. It is time to convince him to "unwant" it. He must be informed how harmful and unnecessary and noninclusive and unfair and egregiously wrong this is.

He must be informed that the gymnastics world demands at least one Open Team World Championship every four years to enjoy all the many benefits that it brings, including equal and fair and logical conditions for all.

Finally, let me say, this is not my fight. It is yours. I have tried to provide the awareness, information, analysis and predictable consequences. It is a shame that this was not done by the authorities before voting. Maybe, this time, my letter will make the leadership rethink. But, it is up to you to force them to rethink and to fix this.

No matter the outcome, I will continue to attend future World Championships and enjoy the show.

Sincerely: *"always and, in all ways, in the interests of gymnastics world wide"*

Hardy Fink

My critique from April 2022 is reproduced below

No more Open Team World Championships - a critical look

by Hardy Fink

April 18, 2022

What have they done?

With all the hype about the Olympic Qualification criteria, did anyone notice the 2022 version of the FIG

Qualification Places				
The 40 highest All-Around Men's gymnasts and the 49 highest All-Around Women's gymnasts without a team qualified, based on the All-Around ranking results of the Qualifications and the allocated quota places mentioned below for each Continent, will qualify by name with a maximum of two (2) gymnasts per NF.				
The Host Country is guaranteed one All-Around gymnast quota place, if not already qualified with a Team or an Apparatus gymnast. Any unused Host Country places will be allocated to the next highest eligible All-Around gymnast based on the All-Around ranking results of the Qualifications from the Continental Championships to which the Host Country belongs.				
Continental Allocation (Quota Places)				
	Men		Women	
	Team	All-Around	Team	All-Around
AGU	5	6	4	8
OGU	1	2	1	2
PAGU	4	6	5	11
UAG	1	2	1	4
EG	13	23	13	23
Host	0	1	0	1
Total	24	40	24	49

Technical Regulations (*version 2 - September 2021 --- Section 2, after pg. 55*)? The mid-quadrennial Artistic World Championships have gone from open access to being restricted to 24 MAG and 24 WAG teams. And, the qualification is through Continental Championships, which all understand to be the bastions of ethical and well controlled judging that we all know have too often become war without bullets. But with World & Olympic team and AA qualification at stake the scrutiny will be greater than usual.

If you look closely at the chart from these regulations, the Continental team

allocations are alarmingly restrictive. There are massive restrictions for the all-around as well. Eighty, in addition to the 329 team and AA listed spots, are specialist spots (8 per apparatus) from the World Cup circuit.

This decision, without much detail, was made by the FIG Council in May 2019. Given the universal and enormous significance of this change, it should have been ratified (or forced to be debated and ratified) by the 2020 FIG Congress that was Covid-delayed until the end of 2021. It seems that did not happen as these Technical Regulations are dated before the Congress. In the Congress exactly 40-years earlier, there was a resoundingly rejected proposal for an A- and B-World Championship with top and bottom two exchanging for the next worlds. At least there was some possibility of mobility and no restriction on participation.

A look at the numbers

The FIG President, who clearly "forced" this decision, said at the time *"Every national federation, even the smallest, must have a chance to host a World Championship."* This is pure fantasy. It will always be the richest

	WAG	MAG	Total	W + M teams
Post-Olympic World Championships (no teams since 2005)				
2005 Melbourne	95	216	311	0 teams
2009 London	146	243	389	0 teams
2013 Antwerp	134	259	393	0 teams
2017 Montreal	146	239	385	0 teams
2021 Kitakyushu	112	189	301	0 teams - Covid
Mid-quadrennial World Championships (open until 2022)				
2006 Ahrus	223	279	502	33 + 43 teams
2010 Rotterdam	218	299	517	34 + 45 teams
2014 Nanning	250	311	561	38 + 48 teams
2018 Doha	230	260	490	42 + 46 teams
2022 Liverpool	201	208	409 ^{quota}	24 + 24 teams
Pre-Olympic World Championships (24 team max since 2007)				
2003 Anaheim	224	323	547	35 + 52 teams
2007 Stuttgart	214	253	467	24 + 24 teams
2011 Tokyo	216	262	478	24 + 24 teams
2015 Glasgow	261	276	537	24 + 24 teams
2019 Stuttgart	234	258	492	24 + 24 teams
2023 Antwerp	201	208	409 ^{quota}	24 + 24 teams

federations. He also repeated the 40+ year mantra of the championships being too long and too costly (recall, they were cut in half after 1995 with the elimination of compulsories and cut again for 2007 and future pre-Olympic World Championships.) And he said this will make them *"more thrilling"*. More fallacy. True; they are long and costly; but, much more importantly, they are also motivating and educational and friendship-building and thrilling and special because they are "WORLD" Championships; not because they are smaller. And, as in all sport, it is not the qualifying rounds that are most thrilling, it is the finals sessions where the fourteen gold medals are contested.

The chart shows that the 2007 reduction to 24 teams did not materially affect the total participation numbers because

individual participation remained essentially open, but these Technical Regulations dramatically reduce those opportunities as well. Total numbers hovered around 500 for the pre-Olympic and mid-quadrennial World Championship; and around 400 for the non-team post-Olympic World Championship. These new Technical Regulations eliminate about 100 individual participants for 2022 and 2023 to a maximum of 409. Note, all the total numbers shown include non-AA gymnasts and do not reflect the actual per-event competing numbers which are usually about 25% lower. Cutting team numbers to 24 in 2007 and again this year for the only remaining open Team World Championship, reduced WAG teams by about 33% and MAG teams by 50% - but notice the 24-team decision applies to both regardless of its unequal effects. Interesting also is that the promise of other FIG programs such as the coach education Academy Program was to help bring more federations to this level. That has shown itself to be true but is now squashed for all those federations that have worked hard to improve. The message: "Stay within your Continent forever."

A look at Continental Qualification

And, the President said it "*will enhance the value of the continental championships*". The peculiar problems of Continental Championships (For example, not one could meet the Technical Regulations specified deadlines this year.) are too numerous to list here, but rather than enhance their value, this risks exacerbating the ethical disrepute and negative publicity into which gymnastics has fallen. It also punishes the less rich federations that now must attend an additional previously unscheduled championship at great cost. Just like judges' advancement and access to the World Cup circuit for qualification and a \$2000 penalty for not providing a judge, etc., this new allocation system is once again Eurocentric or "wealth-centric" or "rest-of-the-world-ignorant" or "who cares?". The cost of travel to such championships is massive for Africa (consider Algeria to South Africa), and for America (consider Canada to Argentina), and for Asia (consider Lebanon to Japan). Much of Europe can reach their championship faster with a whole team by mini-bus than the others can by air and can do so for the cost of a tank of gas rather than costly flights for each member of the delegation. And national federations that qualify must then pay to go to World Championships as well. The problematic cost and time needed for entry visas barely exists for Europeans. These Continental Unions also do not have budget-airlines that are common in Europe. The rich get richer. Congratulations to the small countries such as Benin, Nicaragua, Fiji, and Bahamas that can now host a World Championship in addition to the Executive Committee. Really?

A Continental qualification Team World Championship was held only one time previously, in 1994. It was accompanied by so many costly and ethical problems that it was decided never to do it again. Short memories? The unequal conditions for 1976 Olympic qualification were so corrupt and expensive that it had to be abandoned half-way through and was also never tried again. Short memories? Now we are back to Continental qualification and unequal conditions. What could go wrong? Our history tells us.

An inspection of the three previous mid-quadrennial World Championship participations (2010-2014-2018) reveals that over that time-period 57 different federations fielded MAG teams and 31 of them had placed among the top 24. For WAG, it was 49 teams and 29 placed among the top 24. Not included are many other known teams from the continents that could not participate for financial or other reasons, such as, for example, Latvia, Cuba, Malaysia, and Algeria. Of the 250-300 participants for each of WAG & MAG, about 150 of each competed all-around. It will now be well below 100 with the 5-4-3 format and 80 of the 409 spaces reserved for specialists.

What are the predictable consequences?

So, what can be predicted to be the unintended consequences? Instead of 60 or more federations pursuing team gymnastics, perhaps only 30 will continue to bother. Without local media interest and without a true world team and AA ranking, many will receive even less government funding. With greatly restricted possibilities for AA qualifiers, the only remaining opportunity for them is to try to qualify specialists through the World Cup circuit because, once all the team and AA gymnasts are removed, almost any country could

aspire to one specialist spot (but being a World finalist from among about 100 is not likely). But for most non-European federations, the cost to attend four World Cup events is prohibitive and more so because a judge must also be sent. The rich get richer. Interestingly and perhaps inadvertently, the decades long unwavering Japanese philosophical position to focus on teams and AA will have been destroyed by a Japanese president. For MAG by example: How should the 25 and growing number of member federations of Africa react with 1 team and 2 AA gymnasts? How about Asia with 5 teams and 6 AA when 13 teams had participated in the recent past; and America with 4 teams and 6 AA though 10 teams had participated; and, for that matter, Europe with 13 teams though 31 teams had participated and 18 had been among the top 24. It is similar for WAG. I suppose that many of these "*smallest national federations*" will rush to host a World Championship for the guaranteed AA spot. NOT! They will abandon team and possibly all-around gymnastics, coaches will be less in demand, judges' advancement will not be possible. All because of a FIG imposed system-wide disincentive for them. And, how many teams that deserve to be among the top 24 will be eliminated by a quota system that may artificially qualify lesser teams? Will the open (for now) post-Olympic non-team World Championship every four years suffice to sustain interest? The next one will be in 2025, and guess what? They massively restricted that one as well. All federations can send up to 3 WAG and 3 MAG gymnasts but only two performers per apparatus. That means only one AA gymnast; or if federations send two gymnasts, they can have two AA.

Who is accountable for this world-wide disincentive?

I have attended 30 FIG Congresses since 1975 and understand the "sheep-like" and frequently uninformed voting. But the technical committees (who I hope were consulted) and the Executive members and most appallingly the Council members who are specifically elected to represent their continents and are in charge of Technical Regulations, failed and betrayed their constituents, failed the future development and aspirations of the wider gymnastics world. But these VIPs will have increased chances to travel, to supervise, to campaign. The President's additional comment from May 5, 2019; "*It was also crucial for us to implement a qualification system for Paris 2024 that everyone can understand while being fair to the best athletes.*" is also spurious. Qualification goes from a higher number to a lower number; not from 24 teams to 24 teams. The 2022 World Championship is not part of any real Olympic qualification except the top three teams will qualify and they, of all teams, emphatically do not need this two years before the Games. This was a sledgehammer solution. I challenge you to try to understand this "*everyone can understand*" document and see if you can do so even after multiple readings - and then imagine translations for non-English speakers. Easiest for everyone to understand was the older pre-2004 process of qualification at the open access pre-Olympic World Championship that provided equal conditions for all. Fairness, as the President stated, should certainly be directed at the best athletes - AND, AND, - also at all other aspiring athletes and coaches and judges and federations in the gymnastics world.

What a shame. What will the newly formed "New and Developing Countries Support Commission" think when developing countries are excluded in advance? What will the national federations think once the reality of this diminishment and disincentive is understood? Will there be a counterproposal for a more inclusive future at the Congress this September (this is the year that proposals are permitted)? Will there be a reckoning at the next election Congress in 2024?

It is not too much for the gymnastics world to demand one open-team World Championship every four years. The extra two days of competition is an enhancement and a motivation and a benefit to the gymnastics world. It is not the place to save two or three days of organization. It is not the place to impose a massively unfair and unequal-cost Continental qualification system. It is not the place to present fantastical and spurious justifications for the unjustifiable. This counters FIG's mandate for the development and growth of world gymnastics.