Changes in gymnastics a result of perfection

By JEFF SAUKAITIS
Collegian Sports Writer

Bo Derek portrayed the male fantasy of the perfect woman five years ago in the movie "10." Instantly, people became obsessed with rating members of the opposite sex.

Those receiving a 10 rating were rare and special. After all, it is not easy to be perfect.

But long before Bo Derek came along, the sport of gymnastics had been using a 10 rating to recognize perfect performance of a routine. And for many years, such impeccable efforts were seldom seen. Perfect scores were few and far between.

Not anymore.

In the men's Olympic compulsory round, there had never been a 10 awarded until this year. And there were an astounding 10 perfect scores in the Los Angeles compulsories.

The following night, the partisan United States crowd booed loudly when the judges scored Mary Lou Retton's compulsory floor exercise *only* a 9.95.

Although the perfect 10 had long been a standard almost impossible to achieve, it became an expected event for fans watching this summer's Olympic performances. Those 10 perfect scores in the men's compulsories served to whet the audience's appetite for more such heroics. During the ensuing week, many of the athletes did not disappoint.

But for some longtime fans of gymnastics, it was becoming obvious that the athletes were outdistancing the sport's scoring system. Without major changes in the scoring rules; it was feared that 10s would be so commonplace that judges would be completely unable to distinguish three medal winners from the field and accurately choose champions.

Though this problem was thrust into the limelight during the Los Angeles Games, it had been developing for years. With the introduction of superior safety equipment like rubber mats and foam landing pits, the gymnast has been able to experiment with more difficult maneuvers and have less risk of serious injury.

That experimentation during practices has resulted in today's gymnast performing difficult tricks with consistency and flair. And since the judging system awards bonus points for risk, originality, and virtuosity, average scores have drastically increased over the years since those three elements are more prevalent now.

The current code of points in men's gymnastics starts each performer with a base score of 9.40 in every event except the vault. In other words, a men's gymnast would receive a 9.40 for a routine which flawlessly fulfills each requirement but contains no risk, originality or virtuosity which is not stated in the requirements. The gymnast could be awarded up to an additional .20 for each of those three elements, with the judges' analysis based on an elaborate code of points.

Every possible gymnastic maneuver is accounted for in the code of points, and the tricks are divided into three catagories : 'A' moves, least difficult; 'B' moves, intermediate difficulty; and 'C' moves, most difficult. Gymnasts are achieving scores higher than ever before because some 'C' moves have become second-nature to elite performers in the sport.

Penn State Men's Gymnastics Coach Karl Schier said tricks like a one-armed giant swing on the horizontal bar were not even accounted for in the outdated code of points. Now, although the move is common, it has to be scored in the 'C' range because judges must stay within the currently utilized code of points.

"When you look at a horizontal bar routine now with the code of points that we had, a man ends up with as many as 12 or more 'C' moves instead of having just the required three," Schier said. "If he does the routine with very good form, then the judges are put in the situation where they have to keep awarding the gymnast for these extra-difficult moves. If he does it close to perfectly, he has so many bonus points that he ends up getting a 10 fairly easily."

Vaulting is scored a bit differently. Each vault is pre-assigned a difficulty score which could be up to 9.80 for the most difficult jumps. The remaining .20 could be earned with superior virtuosity.

Since the quality of athletes at the Olympics was so high, virtually everyone attempted a 9.80 vault. If such jumps were completed with good form, it was reasonably simple to attain a perfect score.

Although the gymnasts put on perhaps the finest-ever display of the sport in Los Angeles, some critics said the judges may have inflated some of the scores because they may have been influenced by the crowd.

But Penn State Women's Gymnastics Coach Judi Avener said the score a judge assigns a particular routine is relative, and the only true job they have to perform is to decide who is the best gymnast on the given day.

"I have a philosophy about judging that it is all relative," Avener said. "When you run a race, you know whether it was fast or slow because you can't quarrel with the clock. In regard to the Olympics, I might say, 'Mary Lou Retton shouldn't have gotten so high on beam or (Romania's Ecaterina) Szabo should have gotten a tenth higher on bars,' but I would agree with their ultimate decision that Mary Lou Retton was the best gymnast that day."

Because the competitors did an excessive number of difficult tricks in Los Angeles, it was a rough task for the judges to separate the scores adequately enough to declare a clear-cut winner in each event. In accordance with the current code of points, numerous gymnasts turned in 10' routines. To avoid to too many ties, however, Schier said the judges sometimes had to take matters into their own hands to rigthfully award the top performances.

"In the past few years," Schier said, "judges have told me they have to 'cheat' the gymnast and take scores away from him that he would have normally had in order to make a separation on some gymnasts to make the meet come out correctly. The code of points has fallen behind so badly, and that's a bad situation."

But it is a situation in the process of being rectified. The Federation of International Gymnastics (F.I.G.), the governing body of gymnastics throughout the world, has already written a set of new rules that has just been translated into English. The rules have yet to be officially published, and they will not be until after the collegiate season is well under way in the United States.

Harry Bjerke, F.I.G. gymnastics official, said the federation proposes major rule changes prior to the Olympics every four years. The upcoming changes will take effect in international meets after Jan. 1, and at the collegiate level after the 1984-85 National Collegiate Athletic Association season is completed.

Bjerke said the most significant change will be the addition of a 'D' category of tricks in both men's and women's gymnastics. Only the maneuvers the federation committee determines to be extremely difficult will be included in the new category.

Bjerke noted three examples of what would constitute a 'D' trick:

- a triple somersault dismount from rings and horizontal bar
- a full-twisting front somersault catch on horizontal bar
- a double-twisting double back somersault on floor exercise.

The current 'C' tricks which have become fairly common in recent years would remain in the 'C' category. And a gymnast would only be awarded maximum bonus points for difficulty and originality by perfectly executing 'D' moves.

Vault scores will also be devalued for both men and women, with only the extremely difficult jumps achieving perfect scores.

These rule changes are sure to severely reduce the frequency of perfect scores for at least the next few years. However, Bjerke said he expects the quality of international meets to possibly improve since the elite gymnasts will have to increase the difficult elements in their routines if they hope to attain the same lofty scores they are growing more widely accustomed to receiving.

"Mitch Gaylord and Tim Daggett from our country and along with several Chinese and Japanese gymnasts watered down their exercises (at the Olympics)," Bjerke said. "Instead of doing triple somersaults off the horizontal bar which about seven or eight guys at the meet were capable of doing, they could get a 10 by doing a little less risky tricks that they were more sure of hitting.

"If you got penalized .10 for taking an extra step on a landing from a triple somersault, it just didn't match up with what you could score if you could do a double somersault with a full twist, which is a lot easier to land, although both are 'C' moves."

In women's gymnastics, the current scoring system is similar. In the three events other than vault, the women's base score is 9.50, and the successful execution of an extra 'C' move raises it to a 9.60. Then, the women could be awarded an additional .20 each for categories 'CR' (a 'C' movement with risk) and 'OV' (originality and virtuosity).

Vaulting differs in women's gymnastics in that a women's vault could be pre-assigned a 10-rating.

The F.I.G.'s proposed changes in women's gymnastics are similar. Avener said one of the best changes will be the institution of six judges rather than the usual four. She said such a change would decrease the likelihood of the judges to experience a strong difference of opinion while scoring meets.

Avener also said the federation may explore the possibility of readjusting the 10-scale to allow a superior performance to exceed a 10. But it would seem that these high scores would rarely be approached since the code of points will become much more strict.

If perfect 10s in fact do become virtually extinct in the near future, there are some indications that fans will be disappointed. When Retton's superb floor exercise routine in compulsories merited a 9.95 at Los Angeles and the crowd voiced its disapproval, it became evident that the audience would not settle for anything less than perfection.

But Avener said she thinks true fans of the sport will realize that the Los Angeles Games were just an extraordinary display of gymnastics, and audiences will not expect perfection in future meets — just eye-catching performances.

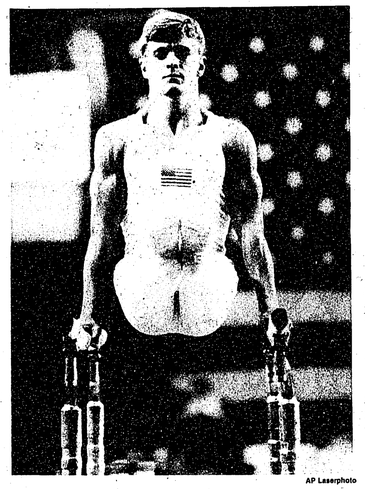
"A 10 is an exciting thing when it happens," Avener said, "but I don't think you sit there expecting it unless you have a lot of 10s like you did in the Olympics. That was just a magical gymnastics experience that week and I don't think people will expect that in the future."

And it is a bright future for the sport of gymnastics. The performances by the United States athletes in this year's Olympics will prove beneficial in a couple of ways.

First, young American children now have idols to emulate in gymnastics. The United States men won the team competition and Retton won the women's all-around competition. In fact, Retton and teammate Julianne McNamara were the first United States women in Olympic history to win individual gold medals.

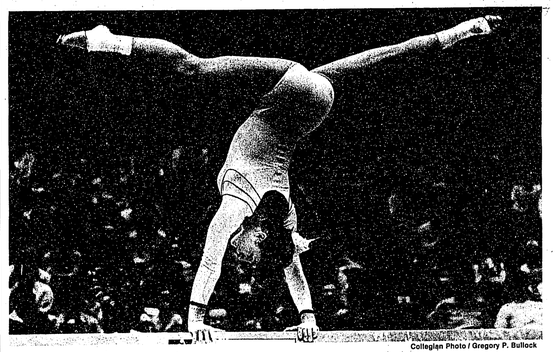
Most promising young athletes in gymnastics in our country get their start in private clubs. After the Olympics, many of these clubs were swamped with calls asking about enrolling children into the programs. Although girls used to constitute virtually the entire enrollment in these clubs, over half the calls received this summer were from boys who wanted to enroll.

With the additional revenue expected from the boys' side, clubs will now be able to pay coaches higher salaries.



AP Laserphoto

The United States' Peter Vidmar competes on the parellel bars during the Olympic trials in Jacksonville, Fla. this past summer. Vidmar and the rest of the U.S. squad captured the gold medal in the team competition at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles.



Collegian Photo / Gregory P. Bullock

Penn State's Holly Haupt pauses during a balance beam routine in a meet against Arizona State last year at Rec Hall. Haupt and the rest of the Lady Lions will find it harder to achieve perfect scores this season as a result of the new guidelines established because of the numerous high scores registered at the Summer Olympics.

Stickwomen rocket past Toledo, 3-1

By CHRIS RAYMOND
Collegian Sports Writer

The field hockey team was both eager and wary to take on the University of Toledo in its season opener yesterday at Lady Lion Field.

The Lady Lions were eager to play because nine long days had elapsed since the end of their preseason schedule. At the same time, however, they were wary of their opponents' potential for pulling off an upset.

"Last year when we played this team, we took them very lightly and we were down 1-0 at the half because we were looking past the first game," Penn State Head Coach Gillian Rattray said. "So after the Lady Lion Tournament we said we must set the pace, we can't just rest and hope it will happen."

This strategy paid off as Penn State took it to the Lady Rockets in the first half and parlayed this aggressive style into a 3-1 win.

Freshman forward Tracey Neave was very instrumental in getting Penn State off to a strong start as she fought off double coverage and scored the first two goals of the game.

"You have to let them (the opponents) know right away that you mean business," she said.

The first goal of the game came at 9:06 when Neave picked up her own rebound and deposited it behind Toledo's goaltender, Sherri Mikolon. Her second goal came less than 20 minutes later when she combined with teammate Shari Priabula on a "bread and butter" play to put Penn State up by two at the half.

Alix Hughes contributed the Lady Lions' third goal in the final 35 minutes of play as she capitalized on a rebound off of Mikolon's pads.

The defense, particularly goaltender Michelle Monahan, also contributed its share to Penn State's first victory.

The goalie is always the one who receives the most praise, or blame, for the play of the defense, but that responsibility did not bother Monahan, who is only a sophomore. She was a little shaky at first, but she pulled herself together and left the game in the second half with a shutout.

"I was a little nervous," Monahan said. "But I settled right into the pace of the game once we got going."

Rattray said she was happy with her decision to go with Monahan and that she was pleased with the netminder's performance.

The Lions' only defensive slip in the game came with 1:57 remaining when man-to-man coverage broke down around the ball, leaving backup goaltender Vilma Cicchinelli vulnerable. Toledo's Ann Smith took advantage of this opportunity and pushed the ball past Cicchinelli.

"That last goal was unfortunate; we shouldn't have had it," Rattray said. "We should have had a shutout, but that's the way it goes sometimes."

Collegian Photo / Steven P. Kerner

Penn State forward Tracey Neave (middle) takes a shot on goal in yesterday's game with Toledo at Lady Lion Field. Neave went on to register two goals in a 3-1 Lady Lion victory.

Monahan shuts down Toledo despite opening-game jitters

By DEBORAH J. STEPHENS
Collegian Sports Writer

Most athletes know the feeling of opening-game jitters. Compound that with a nasty cold developed just a few days before the opener and you would have the feelings of Lady Lion Michelle Monahan.

The field hockey team opened its season yesterday with a 3-1 win over the University of Toledo with goalie Monahan battling an illness as well as the Lady Rockets.

But even a nasty cold didn't hamper her performance as she played a 63-minute shutout before Penn State Head Coach Gillian Rattray substituted veteran goalie Vilma Cicchinelli.

"I was really happy with my performance," Monahan said. "I was nervous but it was mostly because it was the first game and the build-up that went on (in the last week) over the goalkeeper starter."

Monahan was referring to Rattray's decision to start her, a sophomore, over a senior (Cicchinelli). Rattray said she based her decision on Monahan's good performances in practice leading up to the game.

"I was just grateful to have the opportunity (to start), and knowing that (Rattray) had the confidence in me feels good," Monahan said.

After Rattray substituted Cicchinelli in the last seven minutes of the game, Toledo scored its only goal of the game. Monahan doesn't blame Ciccinelli for that goal, however.

"I've been in that position where you're coming off the bench and not fully warmed up and there's pressure on you," she said. "It's just one of those things that happen."

Why she was pulled from the game is unclear to Monahan, but she said it wasn't for her to question Rattray's moves.

"I think that maybe Miss Rattray wanted everyone to play," Monahan said. "I think it was good that everyone played."

Monahan declined to take full credit for her 63-minute shutout over the Lady Rockets. She said her job is made a lot easier with the type of defense that she has in front of her.

"I felt really confident because of the defense," Monahan said. "It's easy to be comfortable with what I'm doing knowing the defense is there. The defense is great, they're really super."

Booters past first road test

By MARK ASHENFELTER
Collegian Sports Writer

Head Soccer Coach Walter Bahr was pleased with his squad's performance during its season-opening 2-0-1 homestand, but he said he would not be sure of his team's ability until it had to play away from the comfortable confines of Jeffrey Field.

If last evening was any indication, Bahr should feel a little more confident about his squad. The Lions traveled to Morgantown and handed the West Virginia Mountaineers (1-2) a 3-1 defeat.

A key to winning on the road is scoring early (thus taking some of the momentum away from the host squad), and that is exactly what the Lions did on West Virginia's artificial turf field.

Thomas Greve scored just 2:30 into the contest on a 25-yard free kick, which was the result of a Mountaineer foul.

"We scored early, but sometimes that leads to a letdown," Bahr said.

"That's what happened."

With just 1:00 remaining in the half the Mountaineers evened the score on a miscue by the Lion defense. After mishandling an opportunity to clear the ball, West Virginia's Geoffrey Warton-Lake got the ball to Amid Namazi, who launched a shot past Lion keeper Greg Kenney.

"We didn't play very well in the first-half," Bahr said. "We certainly didn't dominate them."

The second-half proved to be a different story for the Lions as they got down to business and caused West Virginia to change its style of play. It also started to rain midway through the half and that proved to be an advantage for the Lions.

Since artificial turf slows the ball down, the Lions were forced to change their original game plan. The rain cut down on the friction between the ball and the turf, however, and that allowed the Lions to return to their fast-moving offensive style.

"It was an astroturf game, not a classic by any stretch, but we played well enough to win," Bahr said. "When it started to rain we started to play better."

West Virginia continued to advance the ball into Lion territory, but the defense always rose to the occassion and kept the Mountaineers from launching a shot. Kenney faced just four shots on the evening, while the Lions launched 14 at the other end of the field.

The Lions took the lead for good at the 73-minute mark when forward Jay Ruby was fouled in the penalty area. Greeve then blasted home the penalty kick for his third goal of the season, and the Lions never looked back.

Niall Harrison added an insurance goal just 1:30 later on an assist from Troy Snyder. It was Harrison's third goal on the season and Snyder's second assist in as many games.

"The best thing about the game is that we are leaving with a win," Bahr said. "It wasn't a classic, but it counts."

NCAA acts against Gators

By FRED GOODALL
AP Sports Writer

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — The University of Florida received a 75-page official letter of inquiry from the NCAA yesterday detailing 107 alleged infractions committed by the school's football program.

University President Marshall M. Criser said the university will prepare an official response to the allegations "as quickly as humanly possible."

Criser said he was releasing copies of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's letter as well as transcripts of interviews with witnesses in the probe that started in December 1982.

Among the charges leveled against Coach Charley Pell's program was that of illegal scouting of opponents' practices. The school president said he had directed officials to forward letters of apology to seven schools and added that he had volunteered to forfeit Florida victories over six of them.

Pell, saying that he assumed responsibility for "mistakes and errors," made in the program, resigned Aug. 26, but requested to remain with the squad until the end of the 1984 season.

Criser, who had left the door open to dismiss Pell at any time, would not comment on the coach's status yesterday.

The university released approximately 1,700 pages of documents including transcripts of two taped interviews with Mike Brown, a former Florida graduate assistant who confessed to spying on opponents in 1980 and 1981, and Sonny McGraw, one-time Gator recruiting coordinator.

Both reportedly cooperated with the NCAA, which will not announce sanctions against the Florida program until after it receives a response from the Southeastern Conference school.

"Let me strongly express our desire that the public understand that in many instances a witness only presents one version of an alleged happening and that the NCAA letter of inquiry are 'charges,' however serious they may be," Criser said.

"The university's position will be set out in its response to those charges, and I hope the public will await that response before reaching conclusions concerning the university, its athletic programs, or its staff."

Criser said the letters of apology were sent to the University of California at Berkeley, Mississippi, Mississippi State, Louisville, Florida State, Georgia and Auburn.

He said he offered to forfeit 1980 victories over California, Mississippi, Mississippi State, Louisville and Auburn, as well as a 1981 triumph over Florida State.

"Obviously this is a regrettable step, but I am convinced it is the only one permitted by the standards of fair play," Criser said.

"It is small consolation for our sister universities, but an honorable institution could do no less," he said.

The school president said the existence of illegal scouting had been previously denied by the Florida coaching staff to NCAA investigators and university attorneys.

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