

Remembrance after and of the Gymnastics World Championships 2009 in London

- by Dieter Hofmann, Special GYMmedia Correspondent at the Worlds in London
former responsible trainer in the NKL, Switzerland –



Dieter Hofmann (SUI)

No doubt, they were great World Championships, even if not directly comparable to the big events of 2007 and 2008, but appreciation of the organisers, respect for the active ones and joy for those, who experienced the World Championships in London, are surely a positive memory.

I was not able to directly experience the city London before, mostly just per transfer hotel – training arena – competition – hotel – airport. In 2009 I had the chance, in a competition break, to spend some time in the city. Ok, it did not rain and there was no fog...!

I experienced a fantastic city, shaped by history and modernity, a city extremely worthy of being the Olympic city 2012. When I experienced Beijing, I still had difficulties with the idea of the Olympics and London – now I am sure, that also these will be spectacular games.

It was surely also a great World Championship from the perspective of the Swiss: the performance of Ariella Kaeslin in the all-around exercise and with a World Championship silver in the vault, the 13th all-around ranking of Roman Gisi – not bad...there have been worse times.

The World Championship 2009 belongs to the past; with a view towards the Olympics 2012 it will however remain very meaningful.

In a certain sense there was an analogy to Melbourne 2005, the World Championship after Olympics in Athens. Nevertheless there has never been the fantastic chance, for the active and trainers; to get to know the competition location, training possibilities, accommodation and transport option. The reader will be surprised, why the writer of this piece makes aware of transport options. I have experienced many Olympic Games, World and European Championships, but never has transport been organised on the waterway.

These aerofoil taxis...just amazing! For the first day a little complicated maybe, but then it went well. If there are yet temporary rivals until 2012 – ...an excellent solution!

The competition location in the O2-Arena left an outstanding impression. It would not be correct no fair, to make a comparison to Athens, Stuttgart or Beijing, many aspects are very different, but London will, if complaints of the active or the trainers with respect to the apparati can be pushed aside, prove a great Olympics location.

Apparently the grand encouragement of the British audience concerning the gymnastics events of these Worlds confirm positivism. The matured achievement capacity of the own gymnasts like Tweddel, Keatings, Smith and the upcoming youth, have left an impression.

The sporty side of these World competitions:

Unfortunately, and this is not unusual for the big competitions after the Olympics, there were many insecurities and instabilities and not because too much was new or exercises did not sit well. This was rather not the case.

But there are reasons.

Big events after the Olympics are always shaped by personnel changes, program developments, well a certain „restlessness“, due to developments being made.

Also in 2009 there were enough indicators for this:

* After the Olympics often times leading trainers step back, orientate themselves anew. This is a completely normal process, but influences the international and national achievements.

* Other top gymnasts underestimate the significance of this „post Olympics“, take it on the lighter shoulder, often with negative consequences in following competitions. Sometimes one forgets that in the mean time one is three years older – time does not stand still.

* On the other hand there were also injuries caused, or so-called fall outs. It would be irresponsible, if the one or the other athlete would go out of the way of his responsibility, because one thing is for sure: Olympia 2012, is without “if’s” and “but’s”!

* Certain countries are making use of the start of the Olympics cycle, already by the input of young gymnasts. Young people bring a new dynamic and energy, want to go forwards and are not allowed to be held up, on top of that they will be in the perfect achievement age in 2012. It should not bother anyone, if on the way to the finishing line; there still may be a few mistakes here and there. One has to allow the youth, to form their youthful impetus into a competition aptitude. This one could also see in London.

After the „cosmetic surgery“ of the FIG’s judgement, the judges did generally do their job well. At least from the perspective of the outsider, a lot of peace could be observed, of course sometimes also a little too much with the women!

++ ... Positive:

The differentiated increase of deductions in the E-grade (previously B-grade; „E“ stands for execution, so also to be understood as educations / “upbringing”).

For the previously 0,1; 0,2; 0,4; 0,8, one now has 0,1; 0,3; 0,5; 0,8 and 1,0. Previously one surely occasionally deducted 0,1 ab instead of 0,2, but now the alternative lies much more evidently between 0,1 or 0,3. Here the judge has to make himself heard more clearly! In this way the basic idea of the FIG clearly aims at the exact technical performance, totally correct when one considers the complexity of artistic gymnastics, because artistic gymnastics lastly does stem from „art“, in other words, has to be „beautiful and aesthetic“.

For some trainers and gymnasts this means that in an artistic gymnastics sense „live“ or „don't be a part of it“...! One more thing: in order to affect the achievements of the active ones, by a national, differentiated laying out of the assessment regulations is not enough for international recognition. In London such ideas were not successful. The decisions, though harsh, were correct. Appalled faces of gymnasts, trainers and officials from many countries could be seen, and this is the bitter consequence of national interpretations.

-- Problematic:

* One cannot be entirely happy with the difficulty classifications of the vaults. Despite an implemented change „downwards“, there are still inequalities in the D-grade (difficulty; previous A-grade) in comparison to the other apparati. These unnecessary differentiation affects the course of the competition and does not manage a comparison for the outstanding viewer up to the fourth apparatus in the singles competition and also the experts are having certain problems with their „prophetic“ capabilities or predictions.

* Concerning the course of the competition of these so-called „singles-World Championships“, there are again and again diffuse criticisms – sadly without solution offers.

In the main criticism are the qualifications: It is a hard business for the judges, for the audience sometimes boring, on the whole not very inspiring. Gymnasts and trainers have, in my point of view, adjusted to the expectations of such qualifications.

Experts and „gymnastics-hungry“ viewers feel that one could tighten the course of the competition, but they also see the special possibility to experience the entire world gymnastics on just one day!

O.k., the World Championships are not made for his minority, for those, who want to enjoy artistic gymnastics, the qualification is boring. The longwinded qualifications, the many breaks (also unnecessary) are a reason for this. This is definitely true.

But to see the FIG as the only one at fault is also not correct, even of longstanding critics I could not – at least in the last few years – see any constructive ideas for a bettering of the situation, either.

There could be a purely quantitative, mathematical-organisational solution; the reduction of participants. But this would be detrimentally against the philosophy of the FIG, which wants to allow all member countries the access to a World Championship.

Possible continental or over-continental (group) pre-disqualifications would perhaps bring a quantitative „solution“, but would also separate the highly developed world of artistic gymnastics from those, who love artistic gymnastics just as much and would want to take part in the future and develop over time.

Sometimes I am in inexperienced countries for training courses. An unbelievable enthusiasm for our sports, as is the case in these countries, would therewith be neglected.

To do sports just for financial reasons should continue to not have a future, because then the basis would be permanently missing!

May be – at least I am totally sure – the future of artistic gymnastics lies exactly in these countries. Because who should want to do a „B-“ or even „C-“ World Championship...?

Surely there would be financially strong investors in the Gulf States for instance, or Asia – but it would remain to be a separation.

Particularly the gymnasts and trainers of these countries need the direct experience, the comparison with the best of the world. This is only possible in a World Championship and also only one or two years after the Olympics, because they will not be part of the qualifications or the Olympics anyway.

The comparison that some people make, to pull the qualifications mechanisms in the direction of how they are in football or ice-hockey, is basically unfeasible.

Of course, I see this development first and foremost from the perspective of a trainer and teacher, of course also in the interest of the gymnasts. Economic reasons must not be ignored, but should also not be totally dominating.

* All-around Men's

Of the 243 participants, from 69 countries, who took part in the qualifications only 73 (30 %) completed the all-around exercise.

The gymnastics nation Japan, but also Russia, the USA and Great Britain each had two gymnasts among the first ten after the qualifications.

Also with two gymnasts each, Puerto Rico, Colombia (!) and the Swiss gymnasts contested.

Italy, Portugal, Romania, Argentina, Brazil, Spain, France and Germany each started with one gymnast each, even though the last named nation, had to do without Fabian Hambüchen, a hot title favorite, who had to step out due to an injury.

China focused only on medals on the single apparati in this World Championship.

After Kenmotsu (1970), Kasamatsu (1974), Tomita (2005) the 22 year old Kohai Uchimura fought his way as the fourth Japanese to win the crown of gymnastics sports, the all-around exercise, in a world championship. Curious: The Japanese Ono, Endo and Sawao Kato, „only“ managed Olympics gold in the all-around test of artistic gymnastics.

Kohai Uchimura, who already in the last two years showed his stability, completed the six events gymnastics competition with a high technical standard, but also without any „hot“ rivals. It is a shame that the only real competition for him (Hambüchen) was missing – that would have been a top duel....!

So Uchimura won with over 2,5 points in the lead and could allow himself a momentous swing in between with the „Belle“ on the uneven bars (huge wheel with double summersault on the upper arms).

With Uchimura and Hambüchen the gymnastics world finally got outstanding all-around gymnasts again, with final and medal achievements.

One was expectant of the performance of the British vice-European champion from 2009, Daniel Keatings. With him the junior European champion (after Juri Koroljow 1981 and Dmitri Bilosertschew 1983) already one year later, could cause a sensation with the „masters“.

It was not quite the whole big thing (yet) but the silver medal with 88.95 points is a great result and the first all-around medal of a gymnast from the island. This achievement deserves great appreciation with regard to the Olympics 2012, because he is not the only gymnast of his team of international format. It really goes in the direction of team bronze, a real pointed finger for three teams, which also have this goal.

The third place was taken by the Russian Yuri Ryasanov (88.45) ahead of the often time medal winner Tanaka (88.30), who in the beginning had some difficulties in completing the all-around exercise successfully.

Yuri Ryasanov, who already got Bronze at the European Championship this year in Milan, counts as the biggest Russian all-around hope, even before the trophy winner Deviatovsky (5./87.475). Unfortunately the gymnastics world will not see him again. Five days after his achievement Yuri passed away, 10 minutes away from his parents home....!

The Swiss gymnasts completed their tasks differently

Roman Gisi from NKL (TV Seltisberg, SUI) did his job well and the 13. place is surely an impressive result of a Swiss all-around gymnast in "modern times". Despite all the joy in the Basel country, one should consider that Roman, even with this programme still had a reserve of more than two points. Roman is on a good way forward. In order to confirm such results, his programme has to become more difficult and gain back his already proven strength in the technical execution.

„Niki“ Boeschstein showed his achievements on 5 apparatus, on one apparatus – the pommel horse, he remained beneath his possibilities. The problem here: his technical basis on this apparatus from long since, experts and journalists know this. To accuse this successful gymnast of "failure" is wrong and cannot be accepted by myself and many friends, who cherish gymnastics. It is interesting that after the Swiss-Cup one was already of other opinion. This "up" and "down" doesn't help anybody, not to mention the gymnast.

Claudio Capelli is capable of more, no, much more!

I see and think that Claudio doesn't seem to be in focus anymore, like he was in 2006 or 2007. As a good friend and Fan of Claudio I will allow myself this honesty:

„Claudio, you have to find yourself again, work consequently, this is what I always admired about you. It would be good for you and for national and international gymnastics“.

One thought that Switzerland had four good all-around gymnasts and various single achievements, a really strong team. Claude- Alain Porchet did his job well on the floor, but why only on one apparatus...?

*** Men's Finals**

After the games of 2008, China is trying to form a new team and did without its usual all-around tradition this year. If one is capable of this, then one can do it. China wins four Gold medals.

Zhang, H. (16,20 points) outstandingly secures himself, the first place on the pommel horse and that in front of the entire world elite. Only the exception gymnast of the last years on this apparatus, the Olympic winner Qiao Quin, was missing.

On the rings Yan Mingyong (15,675) is no threat to anyone, as expected, only if he beats himself.

Hats off for the „oldie“, Jordan Jovtchev (15,575), who again wins a medal – this time Silver. Now Jovtchev is the vice-president of his federation, elected not long ago into the executive committee of the UEG and still is a successful gymnast. Unique!

On the bars again representatives of the Olympic country on 2008 dominate, almost as expected with perfect technique, mostly with three „sharp“ and two „simple“ flight parts. Wang, G. (15,975) won ahead of Feng, Z.(15,775). Tanaka with 15,500 points, despite a good achievement, has no chance.

During the qualifications one could not really expect a win by the Olympic winner Zou, Kai on the high bar. There, the „elders“, like Cassina and Pegan, were simply too strong and Zou way not as excellent technically as he was a year ago. In the final though, he fought like in the Olympics. With a stable performance and an unbelievable D-grade of 7.5 he became uncontested World Champion (116,15.)

One must particularly respect the silver medal of the Dutch Epke Zonderland (15,825). Epke had to wait a long time in the queue of the high bar artists, now the hopes he and his loyal fans (one meets his parents on all continents and often in not so easy conditions, but they are always there!) have been confirmed.

The Gold medal winner on the high bar had almost repeated the double of the Olympics and won also on the floor. Tight but impressive the three time champion on the floor and vault, Marian Dragulescu from Romania prevented this. Dragulescu wins with 15,70 p. ahead of Zou 15,675.

His great condition at the moment was already to be seen during the qualifications. Also with the vault he clearly won with a fully packed program: the „Dragulescu“, also highest marks, one already accepts as standard. Now he shows the stretched „Nemov“, with 2 ½ pike twist (Backwards film with ½ twists and handspring summersault stretched with 2 ½ turns). Sensational and now again, after the floor, four time World Champion with the vault. "World record"!

It was a good, partially very ambitious final and this in the context of changed / new ranking regulations, but be aware: without Dragulescu and without a fit Hambüchen, it did not look too good for Europe in the global rankings...!

Switzerland was not represented in the final – at the moment more hope than reality.

However it should be possible, with the understandable orientation towards a strong team and the all-around final, again to be present also in the final.

*** Women's All-around**

73 gymnasts, also 50% of the 146 starters took part in the all-around exercise. As in the past years, the ladies and their trainers put more importance on the all-around exercise.

After Melbourne 2005, the Olympics 2008, now the USA gymnasts also won Gold and Silver at this world championship. After daughter Nastia at the Olympics in the previous year, the Sowjet world class gymnast of the years **Valerie Ljukin**, (European champion, world champion, Olympics winner and together with Gogoladse, the first

gymnast with the „three-time“ on the floor) and current trainer in the USA, could have won the all-around Gold again with Rebecca Cross.

Already in the Hotel „Valotia“ said: *“Watch out, I again have a little star“.*

How true, because with Rebecca Cross this little star clearly lay in the lead right up to the third apparatus with 44,90 also 1,3 points advantage over Bridget Sloan.

On the floor, the last apparatus, until the one but last row it looked like a sure win for the Liukin-„scholar“. Then during a normally simple difficulty (summersault forwards pike with 1/1 twist and summersault forwards ½ twist) it came to a tragic fall (12.875). So Bridget Sloan, who until then was in second position with 57,825, managed to become world champion with 57,775.

The third place by Koho Tsurumi from Japan must be highly valued. Now the name Tsurumi, after 1964 in Tokio in the mens, is again in the winner lists. Already in the last two years she got attention for her good technical education, now the stability was added and brought the first all-around medal by a Japanese gymnast.

Lauren Mitchell (AUS), Lin Deng and Yang Yiling (CHN), Ana Pogras (ROU), Elena Kurbatova and Ksenia Semenova (RUS) also had medal chances after the qualifications but in the MK final they had much too many instabilities.

One has to acknowledge the stable and clever performance by Ariella Kaeslin from Switzerland. She could only better the ninth qualifications place by one position.

The efforts for a new development in Russia and Romania can be unmistakably noticed in terms of technicality, the great tailoring concerning the gymnasts from China (except for all-around) and the USA however did not succeed. But the development should not take too much longer, then the credits for this will be passed on. Outstanding for me the mentality of the gymnasts of the USA in training and competition, the perfected technique is exemplary (opening of the body angles in the handstand positions) the Chinese gymnasts often also connected to instabilities.

Women's Finals

At the vault final I first thought there would be a win by Kayla Williams (USA) or the Olympic winner Hong (PRK).

Ariella Kaeslin and Anna Myzdrikova (RUS) would then fight for the Bronze ...

but it all came differently than expected. Sure, K. Williams clearly won with 15,087 points.

The Olympics winner Hong had, with two times 6,5 (!) the highest final score by a long way. The final score is important, but only if it is paired with stability. On the Finals day this could not be seen in Hong Un Jong.

Ariella Kaeslin did this differently. Balanced and controlled programme – sensational Silver medal for Ariella and Switzerland. This second place is strong after the European championship Gold in Milan and the fifth place at the Olympics 2010. Ariella and her trainer will forgive me for this not so positive prediction.

Yuona Dufournet (FRA), already in the all-around with a very good fifth place, used the higher mistake quota of the others and won Bronze.

On the level bars the Olympic winner He Kexin from China was an unchallenged favourite, especially since Elisabeth Tweddle failed in the qualifications round. Technically perfect and with a superb content (7,1 ! compared to 6,2 and 6,3 from Tsurumi and Pogras). The achievement level of these young Gymnasts was argued about, and one can understand this. Working at this technical level and good content takes a long, long time. She could not have learned this as a small child and with other means one also cannot „learn“. I definitely found what she and her trainers accomplished extremely strong.

Very good and technically also well trained was Koko Tsurumi, who got the Silver medal. Good „work“ by her and her Russian trainer. Curious though: the Russian federation sends a junior trainer from Vladimir to Japan to help, and from this help has become real competition for Russia, because gymnasts of this formerly huge gymnastics tradition were not in the final. Possibly the only competition for He Kexin was, besides Tweddle, also the world champion of 2007, Ksenia Semenova (RUS). After a strong combination (huge wheel 1 ½ twist-direct forwards somersault) she lost control during an easy part and therewith also the participation in the finals.

On the uneven bars Linlin Deng from China won (6.4/15.00), ahead of the very good Lauren Mitchell from Australia with 14,875 points (15,1 in the all-around) and Ivana Hong from the USA. Yan Yiling, one of the top gymnasts of the Olympic team of 2008, is not handling her leading role very well this year and made many mistakes and only got the last Finals place.

On the floor, the last apparatus, finally the hosts came to their hoped for medal.

Beth Tweddle had chances of Gold on the level bars and on the floor. On the uneven bars, already in terms of content and technically strong, she made a silly mistake – no place in the Final, but on the floor she had, with 6,1 the highest score. One could see in her face, she really wanted a medal. She got through, maybe with a little too much gymnastics temperament, but a little too much eagerness. Lauren Mitchell made quite a sure impression, even managed 0,2 tenths more in the E-grade. The lesser A-grade - 0,3 less than Tweddle – made clear the win of the Gold by Elisabeth Tweddle and therewith for the British hosts.

Lauren Mitchell is again honored with Silver. Lu Siu from China is third, 14,30 points. Russia and Romania again without a medal!

China wins Gold twice and once Bronze in the Final, the USA win Gold and Bronze. The hosts manage a Gold medal by Tweddle. Australia gets Silver twice, Switzerland and Japan win sensationally a Silver each, Romania remains with a Bronze. Russia has three final participants and goes home without any medals at all.

Dieter Hofmann

GYMmedia Special Correspondent, London 2009

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