

# NAWGJ NEWSLETTER

March/April, 2003

---



## **JUDGING** **INTERNATIONALLY**

By René Niccollai

A large envelope arrives from USAG. The cover letter reads, "Congratulations on being selected to represent the United States as a Judge at an international meet! Elation, joy, and pride registers in the brain. Then – realization -- are all my elite materials up to date? Take out the videotapes and start practice judging. Pull out the flash cards and refresh myself with the FIG values. Packing becomes a challenge. Do I need an electrical converter? Be sure to pack lots of packages of tissues (would you believe that in some countries, toilet paper is a luxury!), toiletries for all types of emergency situations and some bottled water to sustain you until some can be purchased abroad.

USAG follows up with a box containing my airline tickets and itinerary, the American flag, a cassette of the national anthem, a gift for the host country, medical and media releases for the athletes. A check is enclosed. Go to the bank, cash the check and make an individual packet for each member of the delegation. The remaining cash is the "emergency fund" (no, not for me to use as mall money for souvenirs!). Call the coach with whom I will be traveling and review the girl's routines.

The day for departure arrives and the fun begins! Travel to a mutually convenient airport and meet up with your delegation. The judge, in most instances, now becomes the delegation leader and "mom"! You are now in charge of everyone's passports and tickets. You make all the necessary arrangements and ask all the pertinent questions. First and foremost is to keep your delegation safe and healthy.

Discuss with everyone the importance and particulars of:

- Protocol and local customs
- Making any kind of criticism towards any delegation
- Socializing with other participants
- Enjoying our meals together
- Shopping/sight-seeing as a group

Upon arrival at the destination city, you are either met at the airport by the local organizing committee or you need to find transportation to the hotel. Get everyone to their rooms and settled in. Time for the first training session. Upon arrival at the training center:

- Observe training. Be available for questions or to give advice. Note unusual interpretations or training techniques.
- Introduce yourself to the organizers of the event and confirm training and competition schedules
- Keep a log with notes on the competition facility, scoring personnel, results sheets, audience reaction and special receptions
- Shorthand the routines of the other competitors.

Usually the day prior to competition, a mandatory judges meeting will be held as well as the Technical meeting for all of the delegations. At the judges meeting, a draw is held to determine what event you will be judging as well as your judge number. At certain meets, the 'A' panel is pre-set and only the panel judges are drawn. Depending on the type of competition, a video judges training session may be held. The FIG-WTC person in charge conducts the course. This is imperative, as she will stress the importance of judging by the rules and not by national loyalty.

The first day of the competition finally arrives! All of the judges are wearing a navy blue suit of their own choice. You are filled with such pride to be representing not only USAG but your country as well!! The true significance of memorizing and learning all of those crazy symbols really pays off. Even though you may not speak the language of the country in which you are judging, you can read each other's papers without a problem!

By the conclusion of the meet, your circle of gymnastics friends has certainly increased! Many of the foreign coaches and judges are in awe and perhaps even envious of the working relationship that exists between the US coaches and judges. In most countries, the male coach rules supreme and the judge is basically a second-class citizen. I am so thankful and appreciative of the interaction that I have had with the coaches and gymnasts with whom I have traveled.

Usually there is a closing ceremony with a banquet. Gymnasts, coaches and judges have an opportunity to "dress up" and enjoy each other's company. Presents are exchanged and e-mail addresses as well.

Traveling is a wonderful experience. We so look forward to corresponding with our newest friends; but foremost as we re-enter the country, we truly appreciate our freedoms and our opportunities as citizens of the United States!