



Professionalism in Judging...from Beginner to FIG

Lieve Olivera, Former FIG Judge

Editor's Note: We are always looking for new ways to enhance our professionalism as judges. This year, we have an opportunity to examine professionalism from the eyes of a world-class FIG judge who recently moved to Sarasota, Florida. While living in Australia, Lieve Olivera participated as a judge, team interpreter, or announcer in the World Gymnastics Championships (1987, Rotterdam; '89, Stuttgart; '92, Paris; '94, Brisbane; '95 Sabae), the Pacific Alliance Championships (1984, '86, '88), the Moscow News (1990), the American Cup (1991), the Konica Grand Prix (1993), the Belgian Cup (1994), and the Olympic European Tour (1995). We welcome Lieve to Florida (she recently passed the Level 5/6 test) and thank her for sharing her experiences with us in this article.

Professionalism in Judging...from Beginner to FIG !

Recently I attended a lecture, aptly named : "Do you want to become a judge ? "
I considered it to be a perfect opportunity to establish right contacts, find out facts, and hopefully integrate into the Florida judging community, after having moved to the US from Australia.

While in Sydney, at the Olympic Games, I had been "fore warned" ...I had been told that the Judges Community in Florida was amongst the best in the USA. Needless to say, I was impressed with the lecture presentation by Mrs Cookie Batsche and Mrs Carol Curley. It was concise, exact and all questions were answered in one small package booklet.

When Mrs Batsche approached me to write an article, I happily accepted. Professionalism in judging, after all, runs like a Golden Thread throughout one's judging career, regardless of one's level. To act, react and conduct yourself in a professional manner is simply a "must", a necessary discipline without a shred of compromise.

For myself, judging has been a learning experience with many ups and downs and challenges. I started judging at the age of 16, after having been a gymnast since the age of 5. Indeed, I had high aspirations, my aim to attend an Olympic Games sometime in the distant future. After 10 years of judging I was invited to attend the FIG judges course, where I acquired the coveted FIG Brevet, allowing me to judge any international event.

I was fortunate to judge many international competitions in China, Hong Kong, Australia, USA, Belgium, France, Germany, England, Russia, Rumania, etc... and World Championships in Rotterdam, Paris, Brisbane, Stuttgart, Indianapolis, and in 1996 I judged the Olympic Selection Trials in Sabae, Japan, aimed for countries to qualify for the 1996 Olympic Games. In Japan I gave my first perfect 10, it was a thrill I will never forget.

I have many fond memories, yet I also have memories which seemed to reach a perfect 10 on the level of "stress", and there were sad memories when observing defeat in gymnasts, who once on the "judging circuit", grow close to the heart. I could tell countless stories, however one of my fondest and most interesting memories was when I was appointed to travel to Europe with the 1995 Australian Olympic Team for a 5 week Olympic preparation tour. The tour would take us through the UK, Rumania and France, training with their respective Olympians in the most sophisticated world class gyms, so we anticipated.

After a grueling 36 hour flight from Australia to the UK, we trained and competed in the UK, followed by the highlight of the tour...a week training session culminating in a competition with the Rumanian World Champion team, with Andrea Raducan being a Junior at the time. Upon our arrival in Rumania we found the weather to be unusually hot and humid. We were looking forward to the air conditioned hotel...however what we found was a contrast as only exists in poverty stricken Rumania. On the outside our hotel looked architecturally beautiful and historically monumental, however once we entered our rooms, the true facts of the Eastern Bloc living standards appeared.

The rooms were less than basic, with paint tearing of the walls, no running water, and the TV

had one channel....snow ! There was no air conditioning and no ceiling fans, and the elevators frequently stopped midway floors, imitating 20 minute sauna's. Additionally, the hotel foyer was full of people, day and night, begging for money.

Regardless of the truly poor living standards, the Rumanian Gymnastics Federation treated us with utmost respect and hospitality. As "our country 's representatives" we taught our gymnasts to be grateful, to view this experience as a learning step in their career.

Once settled, serious gymnastics training commenced. We were taken by "bus" (open air trolley) to the training center. Excitement brewed...We were finally going to train in the same gym where the Rumanian World Champions trained, the unbeatable, distinctive, highly respected, disciplined Rumanian Olympians. The mood amongst our Australian gymnasts was electrifying. They had told us countless stories of how they envisioned a Rumanian gym to be full of the latest most sophisticated equipment, with pits under the bars and balance beam, filled with the softest foam and a sprung floor which would make their full twisting double backs a breeze...After all, that is how the young Rumanians made it look like...Dreams have their place...but not in a Rumanian world class gym.

Upon entering the gym, our girls were literally jolted. We were confronted with a hot, humid gym hall, about 3/4 the size of an adequate gym, no pits in sight, a balance beam that was visibly "slanted", a vault whose runway was so short that the doors were opened for the run up starting in the fields, a floor with springs that made a back handspring a chore, and uneven bars with rails which would permanently mark any gymnast's rippling abdominal muscles. As officials we quietly took it all in, however we did not react to the primitive circumstances. This was Rumania after all, where Olympian medal winners were produced like hot cakes. Who were we with all our sophistication, our "know all"....our latest "springboards' and gadgets...yei no medals

Here was a lesson of professionalism to be learned, amongst coaches, judges and gymnasts. Amongst high achieving professionals, the following phrase is often heard" "It is not the action, but one's reaction" that distinguishes a professional attitude.

And that was exactly what our team endeavored during the entire week. Our gymnasts, judges and coaches took it all in their stride, No complaints, merely attitude adjustment requested. However, as a judge I often held my breath and my heart was on my sleeve ..it certainly was not on the rails when I saw those tiny Rumanian bodies slamming against the hard rails, or when they were practicing their double layouts on springs that just would not give.

But what really was the most amazing, most satisfying observation was the fact that the young gymnast trained without complaint, without questioning, happily repeating their sets over and over , executing back handspring layout layout on a slanted, worn out beam without a moment of hesitation.

As I observed the training sessions for almost 3 full days, I became more and more fascinated, and yet I understood what was lying behind the success of these young World Champions. It was not only their dedication and their discipline, but also their professional approach to what seemed inadequate and certainly primitive circumstances, The team was simply undaunted, and applied attitude adjustment under any circumstance. Was it such a surprise how Andrea Raducan reacted to the stripping of her medal at the 2000 Olympics ?

Yes, she was exhausted and it took a toll on the young lady, but she adapted the most professional attitude in her reaction to the press, and she resumed her career successfully.

For myself as a judge I will always cherish this one week in Rumania which taught me the

nature of professionalism when it needed to be applied in the most adverse circumstances. Indeed, we could have "protested", we could have complained incessantly and we could have threatened to leave, we were the Olympic representatives after all,,. However, we decided, as a team to adapt, adjust, and apply ourselves to the situation as it presented itself. What was the purpose of having the most sophisticated equipment, the softest pits,,if we did not know how to apply ourselves in less comfortable circumstances ? Indeed, we were a future Olympic team so we better "act" as such !

As judges, we are often confronted with situations which are beyond the expected or normal. A judge's professional reaction to a particular circumstance is often of utmost importance in the smooth and disciplined running of an event. Judges are individuals who are not only just "scoring" a routine, but they are also part of a team helping to educate and discipline young gymnasts. Judges often do not realize what impact they have on the young children.

Gymnasts often remember judges faces, that smile when finishing their routine, they also remember when 'that judge" was not "watching" attentively or did not acknowledge the gymnast after finishing the routine, or was already 'head down, pen up" while the young girl was presenting herself.

Even if there is no communication allowed, as per FIG Code of Points, between judge and gymnast, there is an unwritten rule of ethics, a rule of respect for the education of the young child, and that rule is simply reflected in the utmost professional attitude of a judge whenever and wherever. For the wonderful sport of gymnastics where we constantly interact with young people we indeed have a larger responsibility than just "giving a score", we are officials with the aim to uphold the highest level of professionalism in all aspects, from preparedness for an event, to attire, to conduct and sportsmanship.....isn't that what we expect from our gymnasts too ?

Therefore, professionalism in judging is simply.... a must, *it is no longer a choice.*

Lieve Jacqueline Olivera
fmr FIG Judge
