

# An Overview of Australian Gymnastic 探討澳洲體操總會的結構組織

Rosa López de D'AMICO

*Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador*

Maraca, VENEZUELA

羅莎·亞米高

委內瑞拉師範大學



## Abstract

The present paper presents a descriptive overview of the structure and organisation of the Australian Gymnastic Federation (AGF). It gives a brief historical perspective and later on describes its present structure. The focus of this paper is on the structure and management of the AGF and emphasis is given to the administration and organisation of artistic gymnastics at the national level. Artistic gymnastics is the oldest competitive discipline in the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) and AGF. There are data from interviews conducted with coaches, judges, gymnasts and administrators from this organisation. This overview of Australian gymnastics is part of a bigger project that deals with organisational aspects and their influence on performance. This research has used qualitative methodology, specifically with document analysis, archival review and open interviews.

## 摘要

本文旨在探討澳洲體操總會的結構組織，透過文獻、面談及觀察等質性分析法了解其結構組織的特點，並從行政者、教練、裁判員和運動員的多層面去尋找影響體操發展的要素及障礙。

## Introduction

This paper is divided into different sections that look at the structure of the Australian Gymnastic Federation (AGF). It presents an overview of the general management of this organisation with emphasis on artistic gymnastics at elite sport level. This paper is part of a bigger project initiated in 1998 (López de D'Amico, 2000), which looks at organisational aspects and their influence on the performance of artistic gymnastics teams at international competitions. Six countries participated in the project; here is presented a partial view of the study.

The methodology used for this research is qualitative in nature; there has been an extensive review of documents facilitated by AGF and sport literature as well. Open interviews

were conducted with eight members of the organisation, specifically with: two administrators, two coaches, two judges and two gymnasts. Thirteen were interviewed in total but eight were selected at random for this research and in equal number for each category. The average duration of the interviews was 1 hour 30 minutes; they were taped recorded and later transcribed. The names of the interviewees are not revealed for ethical reasons. In this paper just an overview is presented of how the AGF is organised as well as the opinions of some of its members. This research has been conducted with the consent of the Australian Gymnastic Federation. The documents reviewed have been those regulations that have been in place by AGF in the last two Olympic cycles; there is especial emphasis on the latest information.

## Australian Gymnastic Federation

### General Information

The Australian Gymnastic Federation (AGF) was formed officially in 1949. It covers: Recreational, General Gymnastics, Rehabilitation, Kindergym, Australian Gymnastics Levels Program Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG), Elite, Educational, Veteran, Disabled, Rhythmic Sportive Gymnastics (RSG), National Levels stream Men's Artistic Gymnastics (MAG), Sports Aerobics and Trampoline.

In the late 70s with the introduction of Federal Government funding assistance, full time personnel were appointed in administration. The first full time administrator was appointed in 1978, the second in 1979, the third in 1997. From there the appointments included a National Coaching Director, National Development Director and other management and administrative personnel responsible for events, finance, membership service, merchandise, orders and despatch and technical matters. Staff members are employed to service the increasing demands of the membership in areas such as: Membership Services; Coaching and Judging Education; Events; Development Programs; Marketing and Merchandise; Publications and Resources; National teams and squads (Australian Gymnastic Federation [AGF], 1998d).

The greatest impact on the improvement of gymnasts competing in the International arena resulted from the inclusion of gymnastics in the first intake of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1981 (AGF, 1998d). Since then progress has been quite dramatic, not only in competition results but also in the catalytic effect which this has had on State Associations, State Government and Clubs. State Institutes of Sport and High Performance Centres have been built for the specific purpose of training elite gymnasts providing complementary support to the AIS.

### Membership

The Australian Gymnastic Federation (AGF) is the sole governing body for gymnastics in Australia. According to the Australian Gymnastic Federation's Annual Report (AGF, 1998a) the number of registered persons according to their membership was: Gymnasts: 78,795; Technical: 2746; Judges: 840; Clubs: 662. In the year 2000, the figures were 600 clubs and 60,000 members (Connell, personal communication, May, 2000).

In conjunction with State associations, a National Registration Scheme has been established which ensures that

all members registered in clubs throughout Australia are also registered with their State and National body. A national registration fee (which includes individual insurance) forms part of the fees paid by the member to their club and State Association. The income generated by this national fee assists the AGF to provide the quality services required and to employ the personnel to administer them. The three membership categories are: (1) Technical: coaches, judges; (2) Competitive: men's and women's artistic gymnasts, rhythmic gymnasts (and the other disciplines); (3) General: recreational, display, kindergym, disabled, and adult.

The Australian Gymnastic Federation in conjunction with the State Gymnastic Associations is responsible for holding accreditation courses for coaches and judges (AGF, 1998b, pp. 19-22), processing applications, as well as maintaining and updating all Technical Membership records. Technical Membership of the Federation is based on one calendar year. Coaches and judges of the Australian Federation are provided with some benefits for their yearly membership (AGF, 1998b, p. 6). Coach education and judge education are written at the national level and delivered by the state association as well as the participation programs. Resources are written by the national body and purchased by the state associations, so a lot of the work of developing material, rules, regulations, programs and resources is done at the national level but they are distributed, marketed, promoted, sold and otherwise dealt with by the state associations.

### Structure

The Federation is based on a federal system. There is one national body, which is the Australian Gymnastic Federation and each of the State Associations are affiliated to it. The State Bodies are autonomous, meaning they control their own functions as does the National Body.

The Federation is controlled firstly by a board of management. The top level of management underneath that is a management committee for each of the disciplines of the sport there. That management committee looks after the internal mechanisms and the running of each of the individual aspects of the sport. For example, there is a sport management committee for women's artistic gymnastics, which looks after the policies, regulations, the rules, the systems that are involved in women's gymnastics. There is a men's committee, a rhythmic committee, a general gymnastics committee; thus each discipline has a management committee that looks after each aspect of the sport.

The greatest change in the Constitution has been the modification of the Board Members' structure. The changes were implemented in mid 1998 (Executive Director, 1998). The New Constitution was accepted resulting in changes of management procedure which were: No technical membership on the Board; New Board composition and terms of office: President and Vice President - four year terms, three Affiliate Members nominated by the State Associations, two Special Members nominated by the Board. The Technical Committees are now called Sport Management Committees (SMC). Sport Technical Assemblies (previously known as Technical Assemblies) will be held once per year. The changes are to accommodate the new sports which are joining gymnastics, "Gymsports" is the new name to cover all the sports under the Gymnastics umbrella" (ibid., p. 2).

### Technical Organisation

The Sport Management Committee (SMC) is responsible for good management of Technical Regulations and procedures to facilitate development and the achievement of the Federation's goals and objectives (AGF, 1998e, 1998g). All SMC members are appointed for a four-year period at the first AGM following the Olympic Games. Each SMC will consist of a Chairperson plus two to four members. The Chairperson and members of each SMC will be determined by the Sport Program Technical Assembly (SPTA) and submitted to the Board for approval not less than 3 months prior to the AGM in which appointment of the SMC members is to occur (AGF, 1998e, p. 14).

The SMC is the elected body which provides the technical direction of the Men's and Women's Gymnastics program. It has the responsibility for the day to day management of gymnastics and implementation of all policies and procedures as approved by Sport Program Technical Assembly (SPTA) and AGF Board. They have the right to make technical decisions throughout the year in so far as they are ratified by the SPTA. The composition of each SPTA shall be one member from each Association, the SMC Chairperson, and one member of the SMC nominated by the SMC. Only Associations can elect SMC members or fill casual vacancies (AGF, 1998e).

In the new structure there is a series of sub-committees; at the time of conducting this research not all of them were formed. The National Sub-Committees execute the decisions made by the SPTA and the SMC. The Sub-Committee members will be appointed for a four-year period. The sub-committees

mentioned in the literature (e.g., AGF, 1998e, 1998g) are the following: (a) Elite Sub-Committee; (b) Level Sub-Committee; (c) National Judging Sub-Committee; and (d) National Coaching Sub-Committee.

### Obstacles and Key Elements

In the quest to critically examine organisational aspects and regulations, the researcher looked for the opinion of some AGF members. The idea was to explore their opinions about variables that could influence success according to their experiences. The interviewees were asked about the obstacles and key elements that had influenced gymnastics to being a successful sport in terms of performance at the international level. The questions asked specifically were:

- (1) What are the obstacles that have prevented your country from achieving better performance?
- (2) What do you think have been the key elements for gymnastics success in your country?

During the interviews the author had the perception that there were certain problems mentioned by the interviewees that were not recognised by the members of the same organisation. It was evident, in fact, that some people identified various problems that sometimes contradicted the answers given by members of the same organisation. This might be happening because of lack of communication or just lack of time. However, all the problems mentioned by the interviewees are summarised in Table 1. The categories in the table are related to the variables mentioned by the participants. Categorising them in terms of established patterns and grouping similar items, or into categories that suited the researcher was avoided. The intention was to make it more meaningful to all members of the organisation and to use the terminology they are more familiar with.

The problems most addressed by the interviewees referred to: financial limitations, few participating at international events (less exposure in MAG than in WAG), lack of credibility towards local coaches, limited public facilities to practise gymnastics consequently limiting the number of practitioners. There are many aspects, presented in Table 1, which are connected with the management of the sport in particular: centralisation, lack of communication, strategic planning, leadership and internal fights especially in the mid 90s. One administrator indicated the limitation of been driven by volunteers "it is heavily volunteer

based and it's difficult because you cannot demand too much from people because they are basically volunteers". Nevertheless, there is a great acknowledgement of the work the volunteers do, otherwise it would be impossible to develop the sport. On the other hand, it was also mentioned that the number of volunteers has lowered due to the changing demanding society.

The financial limitation particularly points towards the lack of funding which affects the number of participants in this sport, e.g., "lack of funds, lack of getting more gymnasts in gymnastics, it should be cheaper for the athlete rather than cheaper for the country, money has been a big, big obstacle (coach). Another interviewee also indicated the lack of public facilities to develop grass-roots in gymnastics, the lack of funding for the sport, gymnastics in particular, facilities, for instance there's no local gymnastics facilities, in our region they are all privately run, there is no public facilities for people to train, that makes it hard to get practitioners" (judge). One gymnast also pointed out that most of the facilities are located in the big cities and the fact that without the parents economic support it is impossible to practise competitive artistic gymnastics.

Another variable commented as an obstacle is the combination of education and training schedules. It is too hard for gymnasts to keep both activities up especially at high school and university level. This is a reflection of the demanding characteristics of this sport, it is a problem that not only Australian coaches and gymnasts have pointed out (e.g., López de D'Amico & O'Brien, 2000).

Coaches' education has been one successful element; this is one aspect that was well stressed in the interviews. In this respect one administrator commented that one key element for success is to have a "strong coach education program". On the other hand the lack of confidence in local coaches was stressed as an obstacle. In terms of the credibility towards local coaches, one of them reported "most of the time they will trust a foreigner more than a local ... not trusting ... Australian knowledge in the sport". There are elements of contradiction in the sense that foreign coaches have been of great support for the development of gymnastics in Australia and they are present at different levels and received great support. Nevertheless, there is a feeling that Australian coaches should also have the same level of trust that foreign coaches are given. This can be supported by the great confidence that exists in the coaching education program. On the other hand, one coach also indicated that the updating activities

for coaches who had been for many years in the system should be critically reviewed because they could become repetitive,

when you have been a coach for long ... I don't want to be disrespectful, it becomes very boring when the people that are lecturing you, in different areas, are the same people every year, and all are people that you taught as gymnasts or people I believe recognised as developing top skills or athletes over above what you are already doing or other coaches are doing. (coach)

The lack of funding to develop mainly grass-root gymnastics, in some states more than in others, made people stressed that in elite gymnastics the individual will of coaches and gymnasts has been a key element to achieve success in this sport. There is also recognition of the funding for high performance, the inclusion of gymnastics in the Australian Institute of Sport and in the State Institutes of Sport. Nevertheless there is the possibility of exclusion of the men's artistic gymnastics program from the AIS because it does not have the good results that women's gymnastics has had. It is important to indicate that men's gymnastics has received less funding in the last years than women's gymnastics.

Some of the variables mentioned by the participants are also found in the sport literature. Farmer and Arnaudon (1996) mentioned the huge amount of volunteers in Australian sport, the distance, and the limited funds that create an unstable balance between elite and mass sport. Auld (1997) however argued that there is no "empirical evidence to support the view that the continuing presence of volunteers hampers the system's ability to produce successful athletes" (p. 20). Browning (1994) emphasised the great importance of the coaching education scheme in Australia, as well as foreign coaches' influence, and also the AIS and the sport decentralised development. The importance of coaching education and the states' institutes in the development of elite athletes in Australia, is also acknowledged by Shilbury and Deane (1998).

**Table 1. Obstacles and Key Elements to Achieve Better Performance in Australian Artistic Gymnastics.**

	Obstacles	Key Elements	
1) Internal fights	50%	1) High performance funding (AIS, SIS)	75%
2) Bad leadership	50%	2) Foreign coaches	75%
3) Government funds	37.5%	3) Coach Education	25%
4) Lack of promotion	37.5%	4) Coaches	12.5%
5) Grass roots dying	37.5%	5) Athletes	12.5%
6) Outdoor society	25%		
7) Geographical isolation			
	Big country;		
	Centralisation;		
	No respect for local coaches;		
	Lack of international experience;		
	Education;		
	Lack of volunteers		

Eight participants. The percentage values refer to the number of people interviewed.

The lack of percentage (%) values is due to the fact that particular issues were only mentioned by one interviewee.

AIS: Australian Institute of Sport

SIS: State Institute of Sport

## Conclusion

Australia has been an FIG member since 1954 (Barrull, 1984). The first participation in the Olympic Games with full teams was in Melbourne 1956; it participated in other Games editions but returned again with a full team Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) from 1992. Men's Artistic Gymnastics (MAG) has not participated with a full team since 1964 (AGF, 1998f). The first participation at World Championships was in 1966, and with a full team in 1970 for WAG and 1979 for MAG (AGF, 1998h, 1998i). There is no doubt that the greatest emergence of Australian Gymnastics, especially in WAG, occurred since its historic sixth place in Indianapolis 1991 (e.g., Browning, 1994; Normile, 1992, 1996). Since then, Australian gymnastics has continued, with ups and downs, making its presence felt in the international arena. The celebration of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney has given the greatest ever input to this organisation to continue developing and imposing quality in the gymnastics world.

The interviewees expressed the importance of management and regulations without being asked directly about this aspect. There is concern about these variables because they influence the development of the sport. Schembri (1987) already indicated that the biggest change in Australia gymnastics development

had to be attitudinal and organisational. Changes have been taking place, especially in the late 90s, however it is evident that more participation at the lower levels is needed. The interviewees, specially those who are in less powerful positions, indicated the need to have less appointed members and more elected positions by the majority (e.g., Webb, Jessup & Keenahan, 1995). The recession period after the Olympic 2000 needs the participation of all in order to maintain the level obtained in the latest international participation. More communication is needed in order to incorporate all the members!

## Reference

Auld, C. (1997). Professionalisation of Australian sport administration: The effects on organisational decision making. *European Journal for Sport Management*, 4 (1), 17-39.

*Australian Gymnastic Federation*. (1998a). Annual report 1997.

*Australian Gymnastic Federation*. (1998b). AGF's technical membership handbook.

*Australian Gymnastic Federation*. (1998c). Constitution 1998.

- Australian Gymnastic Federation. (1998d). Gymnastics Australia History. <<http://www.ausport.gov.au/gym/agfmain.html>>, accessed May 17/1998.
- Australian Gymnastic Federation. (1998e). Men's artistic gymnastics: Sport program management & technical regulations 1998 - 2000.
- Australian Gymnastic Federation. (1998f). Olympic Games: Australia Competition Results. <<http://www.ausport.gov.au/gym/resultf/olymres.html#mag>>, accessed December 29/1998.
- Australian Gymnastic Federation (1998g). Women's artistic gymnastics: sport program management & technical regulations 1998 - 2000.
- Australian Gymnastic Federation. (1998h) World Championship Australian Results. <<http://www.ausport.gov.au/gym/resultf/worldmag.html>>, accessed December 29/1998.
- Australian Gymnastic Federation. (1998i). World Championship Australian Results. <<http://www.ausport.gov.au/gym/resultf/worldwag.html>>, accessed December 29/1998.
- Barrull, R. (1984). *Les étapes de la gymnastique au sol et aux agrès en France et dans le monde*. Fédération Française de Gymnastique.
- Browning, M. (1994, February). Gymnastics in Australia. *FIG World of Gymnastics*, 11, 14.
- Executive Director. (1998, June). From AGF. *Flic Flac the Bulletin of the New South Wales Gymnastics Association*, 23(5), 2-3.
- Farmer, P., & Arnaudon, S. (1996). Australian sports policy. In L. Chalip, A. Johnson & L. Stachura (Ed.), *National sports policies: An international handbook* (pp. 1-22). USA: Greenwood Press.
- López de D'Amico, R. (2000). *Organisation and regulations in national sport bodies: A comparative study in artistic gymnastics*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney, Australia.
- López de D'Amico, R., & O'Brien, C. (2000). Gymnastics and globalisation: In spite of the cultural differences. *Paper presented at the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport*. Manuscript submitted for publication. University of the Sunshine Coast - Australia.
- Normile, D. (1992, January). The emergence of Australia. *International GYMNAST*, 18-19.
- Normile, D. (1996, May). Perfect patience. *International GYMNAST*, 48-49.
- Schembri, G. (1987). Gymnastic development: An Australian perspective. In B. Petiot, J. Salmela & T. Hoshizaki (Ed.), *World identification system for gymnastic talent* (pp. 21-33). Montreal, Canada: Sport Psyche.
- Shilbury, D., & Deane, J. (1998). *Sport management in Australia: An organisational overview*. Australia: Deakin University.
- Webb, P., Jessup, S. & Keenahan, B. (1995). *Analysis of officiating issues in Australian sport with recommended policy guidelines for sporting organisations* (Paper). Canberra, Australia: National Sports Research Centre.

## Acknowledgement

The author thanks AGF for allowing the documents to be reviewed and especially Matthew Connell (Sport Manager - Competitive) who acted as the contact with the Federation. My sincerest appreciation to the interviewees who share their opinions in the quest to improve their organisation.

## Correspondence:

Rosa López de D'Amico, PhD  
 Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador  
 Physical Education Department  
 Maracay - Venezuela

Address: Apartado Postal · 198. Región Postal Central  
 2101-A

E.mail: [rlopezdedamico@yahoo.com](mailto:rlopezdedamico@yahoo.com)

Fax: (58 243) 2474607