

The Sport of Gymnastics in New Zealand

新西蘭的體操運動

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Abstract

This article presents a descriptive overview of the sport of gymnastics in New Zealand. More specifically, it looks at the national organisation of artistic gymnastics and the situation of the elite sector. In order to develop this research, the New Zealand Gymnastics Association provided written documents to be analysed. Interviews with members of the Association were also conducted in order to expand the information written in the documents and to look at their points of view in terms of the organisation of gymnastics and its influence on the results they have obtained internationally.

摘要

本文旨在探討新西蘭體操總會的結構組織，並從行政者、教練、裁判員和運動員的多層面去分析及了解其結構組織的特點，尋找影響體操發展的要素及障礙。

Introduction

This review of artistic gymnastics in New Zealand is based on qualitative research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Triangulation (Burgess, 1982) was applied in order to obtain information. The New Zealand Gymnastics Association granted several opportunities for contact in a period of three years starting in 1998. They provided documents from the organisation on my request. Those documents included the constitution and regulations for coaches, judges and gymnasts, strategic plan, among others. The interviews were conducted on several occasions during 1999. The last stage of the research included an interim case summary reviewed by the organisation in mid 2000. This article presents one part of the complete research (López de D'Amico, 2000) about the influence of organization in performance at elite level in which six gymnastics federation participated, New Zealand is one of those. This article starts with an introduction to New Zealand Gymnastics Association,

followed by information about its structure, membership and technical organisation including information about coaches, judges, gymnasts and administrators. The last part includes the perception of the interviewees in terms of obstacles and key elements that have affected the performance of New Zealand gymnastics at international level. This article is very descriptive in nature, however it provides information that can be used for further studies.

New Zealand Gymnastics Association

The New Zealand Gymnastics Association Incorporated (NZGA) was founded in 1956 (New Zealand Gymnastics [NZG], 1998d). Prior to the formation of NZGA, gymnastics was developed in some Church groups, community clubs and YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and it is possible that the first gymnastics equipment was brought to New Zealand, Auckland YMCA, around 1860 (Stothart, 1967). The first attempt

to form a New Zealand Association was in 1948 when the Auckland Gymnastics Association was approved, but it was not until 1956 that it was crystallised. The first president of NZGA was Andras Pillich (Stothart, 1982).

One of the biggest changes in New Zealand Gymnastics has occurred with the modification of the Board structure and the Technical Committee in 1998. This can be traced when comparing the 1996 and 1997 constitutions (NZG, 1996, 1997b). In the new structure, one of the objectives is quality operation of the Association under the direction of the Management Group (NZG, 1998d). These are very recent changes.

NZG is supported by the Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Leisure; New Zealand Sports Foundation and New Zealand Olympic Committee. The support from the Hillary Commission for Sport and Recreation goes for grass roots and infrastructure activities; and the one from the Sport Foundation is for high performance.

The funding of NZG comes from membership fees throughout the District Associations (by the levy system, which is a population base levy). About a third of the income comes from the Hillary Commission for Sport which is for participation and development work, they support the administration system as well. The rest of the funding comes basically from merchandise, courses, and coach education and other activities. By late 1999 there were three full-time and three part-time staff working at the Federation; the technical managers (five in total) receive an honorarium payment each year (interview with NZG Administrative members).

The NZG administrative personnel is a Board of Directors, Executive Director, Accountant, Administration Officer, National Coach Education Manager, National Kiwi Gymfun Co-ordinator, Women's National Coach, Volunteers (Administration, Coaches, Judges). The programmes run by NZG are: Coach, Judge and Volunteer Education; Playgym (pre-school); Kiwi Gymfun (KiwiSport); Incentive Awards (Artistic, Rhythmic, Trampoline); Age Group and National Stream Competitive; Coach in Training (CIT); Display/Adult; High Performance Competitive (NZG, 1998d). The publication of NZ gymnastics magazine started in 1964 and it has gone through different phases and changes of names (Stothart, 1982), but it is still called NZ Gymnastics magazine.

Membership

New Zealand Gymnastics Association is formed by 12 Districts which register their members and numbers with the National Association (NZG). They fund the National Association based on the percentage of each district's population to the national population. So, this means that, in the south of NZ because they have a sparse population they pay a small percentage to the National Association budget, but Auckland because it has the largest population, pays the largest percentage. There is a possibility for changes, and the individual clubs could be direct members of New Zealand Gymnastics Association rather than the District Associations (interviews with some NZGA members in late 1999), but it has not occurred yet.

NZ Gymnastics levies the District Associations based on the population of their region within their boundaries. The District Associations are autonomous in relation to the way they raise the money. The gymnasts and officials are members of a club; the clubs are affiliated to District Associations; the clubs collect the membership fees and then they pay their District Associations. There is also a travel levy. So the District Associations decide if their gymnasts, coaches or judges pay membership, it varies according to the District.

The NZGA members are classified as Affiliated and Limited. Affiliated members are the District Associations and their registered members. Limited members are: Life Members, Honorary Members, Associate Members, Participation Members. Life membership is awarded to persons who have given long-term service in promoting gymnastics in New Zealand by distinguished and/or innovative service to the Association and the sport. Honorary Membership might be awarded to persons who have given outstanding service to the Association as a visitor, office holder or contributor to the development or conduct of gymnastics in New Zealand. Associate membership is for persons who are desirous of assisting in the promotion of the sport of gymnastics. Associate members shall be responsible for paying a subscription fee as fixed from time to time by the Board. Participation members shall be those individuals participating at any level, through affiliated or non-affiliated organisations in Association programmes or activities or derivatives of such programmes or activities. No membership fees are payable by such members other than the ones payable under the conditions applying to those programmes or activities. New Zealand Gymnastics has 54,750 participation members; 12 District Associations; and 124 Clubs (NZG, 1998d). There are a total of 401 judges; 1,353 active coaches; 12,569 gymnasts (Table 1), (NZG, 1998b).

Structure

The New Zealand Gymnastics Association is based on the national district system. The Board of Directors is elected at the AGM by the representative delegates of the 12 Regional bodies that are the District Associations. Underneath the Board there is one structure called the management group that is coordinated by technical managers who meet once a month with the staff. This structure is responsible for the management operation decisions. The management group makes recommendations to the Board.

The AGM is composed of District Association delegates, President (voting), Other Board Members, Executive Director (non voting), and Life Members (non voting). Affiliation fees payable by each District Association are prescribed by the AGM. Each District Association (DA) is entitled to be represented at all general meetings of the Association by delegates. The voting strengths of each DA are determined, according to the number of registered members of each DA, as defined by the provisions, as follows:

Number of registered members			Delegate/vote
1	to	500	1
501	to	1000	2
1001	to	2000	3
2001	to	3000	4
over		3000	5

Administrators

The Board consists of: The President, Executive Director (non voting); three elected members; and up to two additional members appointed by the board. The Chief Executive is composed of the President, Executive Director, and one elected board member; when needed the technical Director of a specific discipline. The Executive Director, appointed by the Board, is responsible for operational management to the board. The elected member must be a registered member of a District Association (NZGA, 1997b).

The nominations for the Board must be initiated by the DAs before the meeting; if insufficient nominations are received then nominations from the floor can be accepted. The period in office for the elected members is two years; in the previous constitution it used to be a one year period (NZGA, 1996). At each AGM two elected members shall retire from the Board. It must be the ones who have been longest in office

since the last election but if both became members at the same time, then it will be determined by lot, unless they agree between themselves (NZGA, 1997b). Re-election is allowed. The network is via the Executive director who is in charge of communicating with the technical directors or managers. The Board meets when considered necessary; the quorum must be four in which an elected and an appointed member are present.

Technical Organisation

Before 1998 there existed another technical structure that had been in place for many years. In the New Zealand Gymnastics Constitution that started to be applied in 1998 (NZG, 1997b), the new structure of the Technical Committees was established. The Technical Committee, one for each discipline, comprises a Technical Director (Manager) to be appointed by the Board, the National Coach of the discipline (where applicable) as an ex officio member, an athlete's representative to be appointed by the Board following a recommendation from the Technical Committee and three elected members (at the AGM). No person shall serve on more than one Technical Committee. The technical committees have the status of sub-committees of the Board and report to the Board through the Executive Director.

The changes started in 1998 and they have been implemented in several phases. The Subcommittee for the high performance programme/elite grades is formed by: Chairperson (administration policy and strategy), National Coach (testing, monitoring and admissions), Judging (standards monitoring). For example, the Women's Technical Committee is formed by: Manager, Judging coordinator and three members (NZG, 1999). The Athletes' Representatives to Technical Committees was appointed in 1999.

The structure of the National Gymnastics School Committee, present in the 1996 Constitution, disappeared in the December 1997 Constitution. The National Gymnastics School existed for three decades, with ups and downs; the original idea goes back to 1962 (Stothart, 1967). Among its duties were to organise, regulate, control, and where appropriate, conduct courses associated with the training of coaches, education and qualification of judges, the education of administrators or with such other areas associated with gymnastics. In the December 1997 Constitution, the establishment of the Coach Education Programme was indicated as a priority. The objective of this new structure is the implementation of an integrated, sport specific, coach/judge education programme - CEP - that includes courses united for all levels and Coaches New Zealand (CNZ) generic courses, technical development and practical experiences for

judges at all levels. The number of judges maintained to self service the regions and succession planning for international brevet holders are also included.

Coaches

The Coach Education Program (CEP) started to be implemented in 1999; it is responsible for the organisation and administration of all accreditation and qualification courses (NZGA, 1997c, 1998a, 1998b). This structure is fairly new and it has started to be implemented by phases. In the past, the National Gymnastics School provided courses but they were not compulsory (NZGA, 1996). Before 1999, to hold a coach accreditation was not compulsory to be able to attend a national competition, at the moment it is compulsory for national competitions organised by NZGA. The structure of the CEP comprises five levels. Annual registration and fee payment is not compulsory by the NZGA, it varies according to the DA. According to NZGA statistics by 1997 there were 404 practising coaches in clubs with no formal accreditation (NZGA, 1998b). However in the 1997 Strategic Plan (NZGA, 1997c) the need to integrate a coach/judge education program is emphasised.

The network is via the Technical Committee (TC) per discipline. Any resolution from the TC with financial or general policy implication, has the status of recommendation to the Board (NZGA, 1997b). In every AGM one elected member of the TC has to retire, the longest in office since the last election. The TC elected members' period lasts two years, re-election is possible.

Judges

Any one who completes the judges' courses can become a judge. Registration and fee affiliation varies according to the DA; it is not required by NZGA. Most generally the judges are connected via a club and DA. Judges could be considered for the Service Award. The respective TC appoints judges for all National Championship, trials for NZ teams and any other competition run by NZGA (NZGA, 1997b). The DA, TC and Board members can nominate a judge to participate in an international competition with an accredited NZ team; the technical committee recommends and the board decides, rejection is possible only for reasons other than technical ones. (NZG, 1997b). According to the competition, the judges are required to be appointed by the club or DA to which they belong; the expenses are covered by the respective body. If the DAs do not provide the required judges, then the National

Technical Committee (NTC) appoints on behalf; the costs involved are totalled and shared equally by the DAs unable to meet their obligations in terms of the policy (NZG, 1999).

According to the policy of NZG: Judges for panel at trials cannot judge if the judge is the coach of more than one of the trialists (Board decision 5/3/89); Parents or guardians cannot judge in a panel if their protégé/e is participating in the event (March, 98); It is recommended that parents and guardians are not used as recorders in events in which their gymnasts are participating (May, 1992) (NZG, 1999)

Gymnasts

The gymnast must be 9 years of age in the year of competition to compete in the National Championship or to be eligible for selection for a National team (NZG, 1997d). Gymnasts pay annual fees for registration to the DA; they must renew membership every year.

The technical committees in 1999 started to have athlete representatives appointed by the Board. The TC determines the athletes participating in any national training squad and participation in trials associated with national team selection (NZGA, 1997d). The selection criteria are based on the results of the current year competitions; the final selection is conditional upon passing the fitness and performance criteria (NZGA, 1998d). The performance criteria are established according to the competition.

There is no national training centre. Since late 1997 the Men's Technical Committee (MTC) discontinued the National Squad Training Program (NSTP) and now relies on the clubs. The allocation of funding is given by the number of participants registered in each program: WAG, MAG, and the other programs; WAG is the program that has more participants. Men's Technical Committee classifies gymnasts for travel fund assistance based on achievement and maintenance of performance. The Men's Technical Committee has a limited fund which it will utilise to assist those gymnasts who in the opinion of the Men's Technical Committee are making the best development progress, achieving the best competition results and are or are likely to produce enhanced international competition results for New Zealand in the future. The grants will be made at the complete discretion of the Men's Technical Committee which will use the grants to best achieve its aims (NZGA, 1998d).

Obstacles and Key Elements

Eight members of the organisation were asked what, in their opinion, have been the key elements for gymnastics development in New Zealand and the obstacles that have prevented New Zealand gymnastics from achieving better performance at international level. The answers of the interviewees are summarised in Table 2. The interviewees included: two administrators, two coaches, two judges and two gymnasts. All of them are involved with elite gymnastics, the administrators are members of the Executive Board.

The problems most addressed by the interviewees referred to: financial limitations, lack of government support, small population in the country, few good gymnasts at lower level, national culture, few public facilities to practise gymnastics, no national training centre, geographical distance from countries that are top in gymnastics thus limiting more international exposure, among others. There are many aspects mentioned that are connected with the management of the sport in particular: poor management in terms of setting clear objectives to follow, small number of professional coaches, lack of a compulsory coaches' education scheme, lack of promotion, organisation dependant on volunteers and internal divisions.

In terms of the management of the organisation, one interview commented about the administrators, "I see they haven't taken a long look to the future, to set the strategic directions, to set where they want to go, and to provide the governance for the sport" (Administrator-1). The interviewees commented that the previous administration was conservative and safe, in the sense that economically speaking the Association was always responsible with the national sport direction. Nevertheless, "the conservative approach of the Association had held back better goals. I think it is conservative partly because it is a volunteer type organisation ... we are evolving" (Administrator-1). The New Zealand Board after 1997 has started to implement changes, the administration and Board structure changed in 1998, there are some paid staff in the National administration area, all these changes made the interviewees believe that the organisation has evolved and in some ways is moving towards a better management.

In terms of financial limitations and lack of government support the interviewees commented that the main problem is that if the sport does not get a good rank internationally, then they do not receive enough funding for elite sport, in this case artistic gymnastics. The Association gets funds from the memberships and also from the government, e.g.,

"The external support comes from the Hillary Commission which is not for high performance. It is for grass roots and we do quite well, gymnastics has a lot of children. The Sport Foundation gets money from the government and will sponsor the sports that do well internationally, so gymnastics does not get much. That is for all sports in the country, but the sports that NZ government say will do well, get more money" (Administrator-1).

The lack of economic support affects all areas of the organisation. The criteria established to fund sport that performed well internationally is not doing any good to the gymnastics development. One of the interviewees explained:

"Funding, we definitely don't get enough, there are some sports like rugby, netball who do get a lot of government funding. There are some target criteria like be in the top 10 in the world, so we in gymnastics will never ever achieve because we have a small population to start with. So again because we don't get to those levels then we don't get enough funding so don't get any better. We just have six full time coaches in the country and most of them working in the recreational level. The government is wrong" (Coach-1).

All the interviewees were quite aware of the funding problem and the criteria set to receive it. As soon as one of the gymnasts was asked about the obstacles that have prevented New Zealand from achieving performance, the immediate answer was funding again, e.g., "Probably the biggest one is funding because it's all the time the same story because if you don't have money then they cannot keep any coaches and support the gymnasts while they are training, and achieve results overseas, and our National Funding Body wants us to achieve good results every 4 years to receive the funding so, it's a sort of a vicious circle" (gymnast-2).

So, in general the lack of funding to elite gymnastics brings as a consequence, lack of resources, lack of money for scholarships, money to travel, money to high performance centres, etc. This situation creates a feeling of uncertainty, frustration and stress to the members of the community, e.g., "... we are very under resource based and we are very under resource financial based. So those two limits, every thing we do, I feel it, everything in my job I do, I only have to, I have never done anything properly because we don't have the resources to do it properly" (administrator-2).

Another problem mentioned by several interviewees was the New Zealand culture. According to the interviewees, in New Zealand there is a tendency to do outdoor sport and New Zealand is very sporting, but gymnastics specifically elite gymnastics is not popular. It is considered very demanding, too expensive and education always comes first (e.g., López de D'Amico & O'Brien, 2000). Other variables indicated were the low number of paid staff, the number of volunteers is decreasing, the low promotion of elite gymnastics and there is also "ignorance, politics, and lack of resources" (administrator-1).

Among the key elements the variables mentioned were: the influence of foreign coaches, the grass root programs, clubs, and the recent changes in the NZG structure. Foreign coaches were mentioned as being important to the development of New Zealand Gymnastics, nevertheless so far they have not been able to have so many, the situation has been changing. In countries in which government financial support is not strong there is more acknowledgment of the particular structures and members of the organisations. It was mentioned the hard work of a New Zealand coach who created several programs (judge-2) and got success in international competition with a medal won by her gymnast "I think after the success of Niki Jenkinson in 1990 Commonwealth Games, that was a big push for gymnastics in New Zealand" (judge-1). So, the international success was a great incentive to New Zealand gymnastics.

A general acknowledgement is also given to two main elements: the grass root and the clubs. The grass root gymnastics program through the schools for 30 years has provided the base for gymnastics activities; the other element is amateur clubs around the country that keep the kids going to the gym, it has been going for a long time and it is based on the volunteer system. In this sense one interviewee commented on the importance of the base development:

"the success of our great general gymnastics programs and the participation areas have been a key element particularly the growth in the pre-school area and our Kiwi sport which is a huge award program that we've got back into the school because we've lost a lot of our ground in the schools and that has been a big success and therefore we have a lot more people doing gymnastics at the base level now. These changes have been probably in the last 6 or 7 years, those in general gymnastics areas have not been more than in the last two years" (administrator-2).

When looking at the different variables in Table 2 some common elements arise. These elements are directed towards criteria and organisational aspects. The recent changes in the sport management area are believed to have made the development of sport go in a good direction:

"Getting our executive officer full time, that only happened 2 or 3 years ago, ... part time in kinder education, ... part time in coaching education. We are becoming more professional ... we are not relying on volunteers all the time, there's certainly a huge amount of volunteers but we are having some professional people there and they are making it more professional It is a slow process but it's working. It is mostly in management getting more professional and more organised. The only problem is that we still don't have enough funding" (Coach-2).

All the interviewees believe that the recent changes in the management of the sport it could benefit the development of elite gymnastics. There is a need to be more independent from government funding, so the cuts they made to those sports, like gymnastics, that do not get ranked in the first ten places in the world, would not be affected so much. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before the NZGA could be economically independent. Meanwhile they will continue working with the few resources they have. There is also recognition of the great benefit that more research in gymnastics and cooperation between the academia-national associations could provide to the sport.

Conclusion

NZGA became a member of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) in 1962 (Barrull, 1984). In that year, a representative team of three women participated at the World Championship in Prague (Stothart, 1967), and the first participation in the Olympic Games was in Tokyo 1964. NZGA has had some success in the Commonwealth Games. In the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games two participants from New Zealand were present in gymnastics (one in MAG and another in WAG).

In spite of the limited number of interviewees, their comments provide interesting points of view that are worth considering. Moreover, some of the aspects mentioned by the participants are also found in the general sport literature about New Zealand. The obstacles mentioned by the interviewees are also reinforced by Stothart (1982), who referred to the geographical isolation, processes of team selection, lack of

a clear long term policy. In one of his books about Gymnastics in New Zealand he summarised:

it is a history of inevitable progress despite rampant parochialism, limited funds, sub-standard equipment, lack of public understanding and support, a paucity of qualified coaches, total disregard from other national sports organisations and the fact that, internationally, we have started decades behind the great gymnastics nations of the world (p. 3).

Chalip (1996) when analysing New Zealand's sport policies found that there were no suggestions of administrative reforms to assure provision of consistent coaching at regional or local events ... the concern was for coaching improvement and athlete identification rather than for implementation and proliferation of programs to nurture competitive excellence (p. 317). Dale (1993) pointed out that most of the administrative work is based on volunteers and that "90,000 people a month volunteer themselves for sport coaching and administration" (p. 15). Other problems found in the literature are declining of children's participation, lack of management expertise (Trenberth & Collins 1994), low status of coaching profession (Chalip, 1978), few quality volunteer coaches, few volunteers, and few facilities (Allison & Donaldson, 1999). Chalip (1996) and Dale (1993) respectively considered athlete's individual drives and volunteers as key elements for success in New Zealand sport. All these coincide with the opinions of the interviewees.

There is a considerable development in general gymnastics through the Kiwi program, clubs, and gymnastics included in the school program, however the development of elite sport is strongly affected by the lack of funding. The lack of a national training centre and the very little government support has made the development of elite gymnastics very slow. The interviewees commented that compared with Australia, twelve years ago, they were more or less at the same level. However, that has changed and the difference now is considerable. The members of the organisation in spite of their differences and economic limitations have continued developing this sport. Gymnasts, we better say parents, have to pay high fees for training at the national level at the moment (cost are higher for the women's team). There are several exchange strategies with Australian gymnastics, e.g., the coaching education program that has started to be implemented as compulsory, the men's technical programs, among others; these type of activities can benefit both organisations. Nevertheless, there is an increased need to receive more support for elite gymnastics and to make

it more accessible to a bigger number of practitioners. The changes at the managerial level have started and have been well received by the community, however the results will take time to be observed. Changes of this nature are like an elite gymnast career, they can take many years to see the results only if they are well developed.

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Table 1. Statistics of Coaches, Judges and Gymnasts in New Zealand.

Judges	Coaches	Gymnasts
Total Judges: 401	Total active coaches 1,353	Total Gymnasts 12,569
- Level 1 292	- Non qualified* 625	- Preschool 2,391
- Level 2 42	-GGQ** 421	- Introductory 7,732
- Level 3 45	-Stage 1 142	- National Junior 1,981
- International: 22	-Stage 2 76	- National Senior 220
	-Stage 3 38	- High Performance 93
	-Other Qualification 51	- Other149
	*Including 221 coaches in training	
	** General gymnastics qualification	

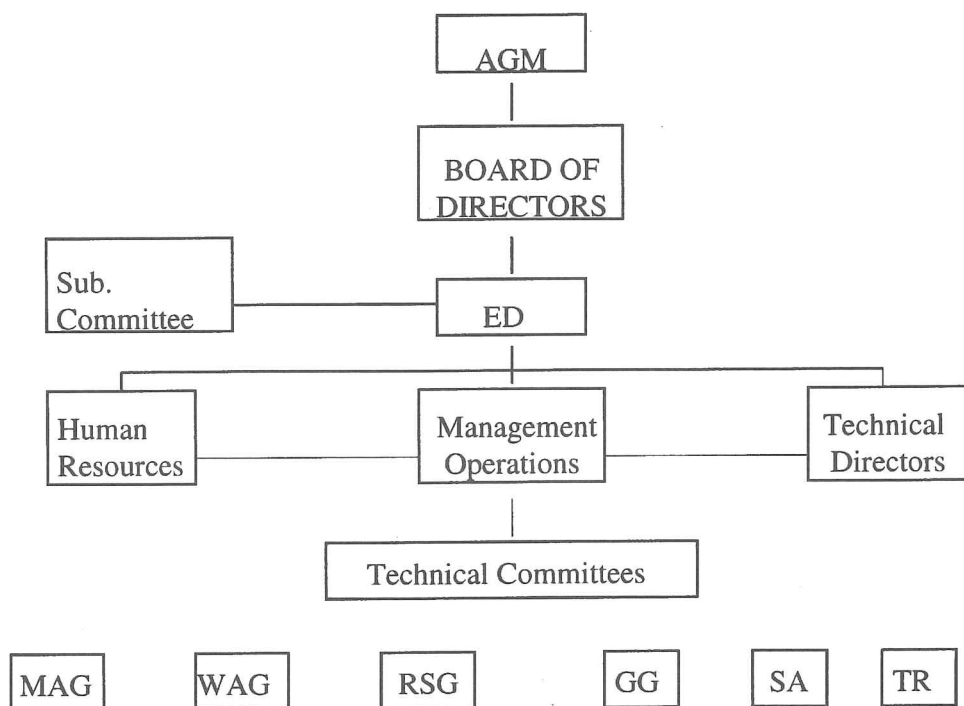
(NZG , 1998b, p. 4-5)

Table 2. Key Elements and Obstacles that Have Prevented New Zealand Gymnastics from Achieving Better Performance.

Key Elements	Obstacles
1) Foreign coaches 2) Individuals 3) Grass root programs 4) Clubs 5) More staff involved in organisation 6) Gymnastics in education system; 7) International result; 8) Health & safety regulations	1) Lack of funds 2) Lack of resources 3) Poor management 4) Culture 5) Internal fight 6) Population 7) Lack of coach education 8) Facilities 9) Low number of good gymnasts at younger level 10) Professional coaches 11) Education 12) Geographical distance 13) Research in gymnastics; 14) Volunteers; 15) Advertising; 16) Government

Variables organised by the order of importance given by the interviewees

Figure 1. New Zealand Gymnastics Organisation Chart.



(NZG, 1998d, p. 5)

MAG: Men's Artistic Gymnastics WAG: Women's Artistic Gymnastics
 RSG: Rhythmic Sport Gymnastics GG: General Gymnastics
 SA: Sports Aerobics TR: Trampoline AGM: Annual General Meeting