

Written by Dwight Normile  
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Every four years the Olympic venues and staffs get a dress rehearsal for the real event. From a sporting standpoint, test events have often fallen short in terms of relevance. Some countries don't show up, while others send B- and C-team gymnasts. But by making the 2012 Olympic Test Event in London a second qualifier for teams and individuals, the FIG created a competition with built-in drama. Was it a good thing? On some fronts (ticket sales, YouTube live streaming) it certainly was.

Following are a few thoughts on what transpired in London this week.

**Test Event Team Competition:** I think it was a mistake to use the test event to qualify the final four teams to the Olympics. All 12 teams should qualify under the same conditions, which was not the case this time. At the test event, teams could use first-year seniors that were ineligible for the Tokyo worlds three months ago. (I preferred the old rule that allowed 15-year-olds to compete in the worlds the year before the Olympics.)

The biggest losers were the Canadian men and Spanish women, both of whom would have qualified under the old rules with their 12th-place finishes in Tokyo.

It would make a lot more sense to use the test event specifically for individual qualification. And if the FIG *really* wants to raise the level of competition at the Olympics, then it should reduce the number of all-around berths and add more top specialists via the previous worlds apparatus finals.

**China:** I am not quite sure why China sent 2011 balance beam world champion **Sui Lu** to this competition. She was lucky to avoid injury in the beam final, where she placed last with a 10.366. And on floor, where she is the world silver medalist, she finished only seventh out of

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eight.

I can understand why they sent **Yao Jinnan**, who is young and has a legitimate shot to win the Olympic all-around, but Sui has already competed in three worlds, including the one in 2009 in the O2 arena.

**Double Standard:** In his Jan. 3 "Letter from the President," **Bruno Grandi** called for the following:

"In a world where globalization and a world without borders are core issues, I would invite you to move beyond national, continental or international mind-set and strive toward a universal sport, as unique in its philosophy as it is diverse in cultural participation. And yet, a self-serving mission continues to permeate our ranks."

On Jan. 12, during the test event apparatus finals, Grandi could be seen congratulating fellow Italian **Alberto Busnari** immediately after the gymnast's fine performance on pommel horse.

Did the FIG President, who holds a position that requires complete impartiality, cross the very line of nationalism he is trying to eradicate?

**Steven Legendre/USA:** I can't help but wonder if the test event was Legendre's Olympics, given that he and training mate **Jake Dalton** share the same best events. At the Tokyo worlds, Dalton did floor, rings and vault in the team final, while Legendre did only floor and vault. And that was on a six-man team. London 2012 will feature five-man teams. Still, you never know what's going to happen between now and the summer, regarding the health of every contender.

**Madeline Gardiner/CAN:** Does anyone else see a bit of **Svetlana Boginskaya** in Gardiner? She has a certain flair and style that reminds me of the great Belarusian.

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**Ken Ikeda/CAN:** The apparatus finals were already a mere exhibition with medals, so I could see how Ikeda might not have been very motivated to compete in the parallel bars final after his team failed to qualify to London. And his performance was proof.

**Jordan Jovtchev/BUL:** At 38 (39 on Feb.24), and with various body joints conspiring mutiny, the Bulgarian veteran willed himself through six routines to qualify for his sixth consecutive Olympics. If he competes in London this summer (and I'm sure he will), he will surpass Finland's

**Heikki Savolainen**, who competed in five games (1928, '32, '36, '48, '52; World War II canceled the games in 1940 and '44). Unique to Jovtchev's streak is that he's made his last three Olympics as an individual. Had he not qualified via the test event, perhaps he would have been given a wild card berth.

Maybe he'll need it in 2016.