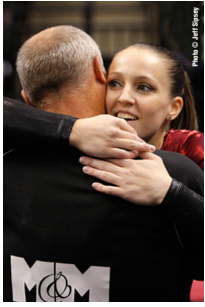


Written by dwight normile
Friday, 01 June 2012 10:23



With all the creative videos on YouTube for iconic individuals, spectacular crashes or, more recently, the ultimate gymnastics routine, I got to thinking about tricks I'd like to see regardless of how they would fit with the Code.

Steven Legendre, Chris Brooks or Matthias Fahrig on floor: Punch double front step-out to handspring- or roundoff-whatever. And while we're on the subject of multiple front somersaults, how about a front-1-3/4 roll-out to tucked front? Just because a skill doesn't add tenths doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. It certainly didn't stop

Kyle Shewfelt

from winning Olympic gold.

Aliya Mustafina, Viktoria Komova or Beth Tweddle on uneven bars: Each of these gymnasts is excellent with the Shaposhnikova-half variation, but instead of following it with a kip, I'd love to see a Zuchold (jam hop to handstand back to the low bar). That skill was a lot more common when the bars were closer, so it would be more difficult today, but not impossible.

And while we're on the subject of Shaposhnikovas, I am still amazed that no deduction is incurred when a gymnast does nothing on the backswing of this skill.

Double-double off uneven bars: The layout double-double off high bar is the dismount of choice for men, but it is rare off uneven bars (named after **Elise Ray**), simply because women get less air time. So most women try it in an open tuck position, which presents its own challenges, especially for gymnasts who have been competing a tucked full-out (Tweddle, Komova,

Katelyn Ohashi

). It is really difficult to complete the double twist if it is initiated after the first somersault is completed. The tuck position makes it even harder, since it slows the twist but increases the somersault rotation. Elise Ray and

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Shawn Johnson

both did the skill in the layout position.

Compulsories: I miss them ... dearly. It's not that I don't enjoy difficult skills and combinations, but rather that I also love to see simple skills taken to the ultimate in execution. A handspring-tucked front vault kicked out super early and stuck cold. A delayed tuck back on floor that seems to hang in the air. A hecht off high bar that soars eight feet above the bar. How often do we see amplitude and supreme execution in today's optionals?

Compulsories also were the perfect warm-up for optionals at worlds and Olympics. I recently asked FIG Women's Technical Committee **Nellie Kim** about the elimination of compulsories after the 1996 Olympics.

"I was against cancellation of compulsory exercises," she told me. "I even spoke at Symposium. I tried to defend compulsories."

Maybe with new leadership in the FIG, there will be hope for their return?

Cheating: It's always interesting to read FIG President **Bruno Grandi's** remarks on cleaning up the sport. In his May *Letter From the President*, he wrote: "The vast majority of our judging panels have embraced our best practices. Only a few ignorant individuals, trapped within the parochial mesh of their national flags, continue to resist change and pursue this dead end."

Right after I read this I watched the top three vaulters at the recent Men's Europeans, and even though there were no Romanian judges on the panel for event finals, I could only smile/frown at the final ranking: 1) **Flavius Koczi** (ROU) 16.116; 2) **Igor Radivilov** (UKR) 16.066; 3) **Denis Ablyazin** (RUS) 16.062.

Among this trio on that day, Koczi was simply a boy among men. The main criteria for judging

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vault are height and distance. Besides the fact that Koczi does two similar vaults ([Kasamatsu-double twist; handspring-randi, both 7.0](#)), his first vault landed extremely close to the vault table. His second vault traveled a bit farther, but had a straddled pre-flight to help initiate the twist and his form was loose throughout. Judges seem to evaluate the landing only, like a diver's splash.

Abyazin vaulted a piked double Tsukahara (7.0) and a roundoff half-on to handspring-randi (7.2). [Both of his vaults](#) were better than both of Koczi's. (The Kasamatsu-double twist is probably over-valued compared with the 7.0-double somersault vaults.)

Radivilov threw the highest Dragulescu I've ever seen, kicking into the half turn sooner than even Dragulescu himself. Then he did a piked double Tsukahara. Even with steps on the landings, his [vaults](#) also were better than Koczi based on his height and distance. Pick your winner between Abyazin and Radivilov, but the judges had no business placing Koczi above either.

Memmel's Magic: That was the title of the story we ran on Chellsie Memmel in our November 2002 issue. A year later she was receiving the loudest cheers in the Anaheim Pond for her heroics at the world championships. After winning Pan Ams, she was flown in as a fill-in for a U.S. women's team that was snapping ligaments and tendons with regularity. Turns out she was the most clutch competitor on that team, leading the Americans to their first world team gold. But this is old news.

Even though Memmel placed eighth at the 2011 Visa championships (and with an aborted bars routine on day two), I don't think she had a chance of making the 2012 Olympic team. But I do believe her presence at Visa championships, which was denied by U.S. national team coordinator **Marta Karolyi**, would have been a win-win for Memmel and USA Gymnastics. No, she didn't score at least a 14.00 on beam at the U.S. Classic, but since when has the U.S. Olympic women's team ever been selected solely by scores?

Few emotions are as intense as a parent's protective love for his children, so I can understand the pain **Andy Memmel** must be feeling right now.