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Hey, remember me? Haven't been around much lately. Been twiddling my thumbs watching them try to throw a party without me. Didn't work, though. I've always been the main course, you see, and you can't have a banquet with only salads and desserts. You need something to sink your teeth into, to relish and talk about later.

Oh, sorry ... it has been awhile. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the once-coveted all-around competition. Didn't realize people forgot so soon.

Seems I've been given a vacation I didn't ask for. Knew it was coming, though. Ever since the New Life rule started back at the 1989 Stuttgart Worlds, I've been losing my pull. I used to be worthy of the greatest gymnasts in the world. To win me, it took a nerve-racking set of compulsories and another two nights of risky optionals, not to mention a week of sleepless nights. And every score counted!

Then the powers that be decided to give everybody a break. They figured the judging games in prelims were affecting the individual medals later. So they decided to start from scratch to claim me. Heck, they even allowed replacements on the big night. At the 1985 Montreal Worlds I was a tag-team event!

I was forced to swallow my pride. Then they trimmed me even further when compulsories disappeared after the 1996 Atlanta Games. I used to *love* to weed out the impostors during compulsories. Sometimes it was hard to keep a straight face!

Written by dwight normile

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But I managed, even though the world arena had been reduced to little more than an American Cup title. Suddenly people were proclaimed World and Olympic champs between meals. Preposterous! I figured that was the last straw.

I figured wrong.

Get this: (Are you sitting?) Now, some of the coaches and gymnasts have complained that it's *t oo* strenuous to compete on all the events the same day. They've actually been having meets for a few years now without asking me to come. Nobody asks who won anymore, because nobody really does.

I was relieved when I heard the World Cup was back this year. I used to enjoy having the top 36 men and women duke it out for yours truly. No team event to distract or, heaven forbid, exhaust the poor souls. Me in my finest hour.

Then I learned via the grapevine that the World Cup didn't think it needed me. Change that; they flat out didn't *want* me! In an effort to encourage more participation among the waning international elite, the brains behind this farce figured I would scare away more of the big names. Can you believe it?!

The big show in Sabae, Japan, where the '98 World Cup champions were finally crowned (yawn), featured 10 different women (not counting Japan, who made it by default). I don't mean 10 women on each event; 10 women total! That's what I call an elite field.

And can you believe **Svetlana Khorkina** was entered on all four events and won nothing. That's quite an accomplishment. But hey, at least she didn't have to compete the all-around, right?

I'm going to take off now. And if I'm not shown a little more respect soon, I may not come back at all. And if I don't, just remember this: nobody keeps winning.

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