

Written by Dwight Normile  
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*The proposed all-scores count format could finally lead to a new champion, writes IG Editor Dwight Normile.*



In May, women's collegiate coaches voted 60-3 to dump the Super Six in favor a "four-on-the-floor" final at the NCAA championships. Their rationale was that the six-team final was not fan- or TV-friendly, since rotation byes skewed the running totals and rankings of the six teams.

Considering the lopsided vote, it would be a surprise if the proposal is not accepted by the NCAA, which is expected to make a decision soon.

"I still have some concerns about whether this will get through, because it's got to go to the Championship Management Council, and those are administrators and typically they don't know a lot about gymnastics," Utah coach **Greg Marsden** told IG. "So this is not a done deal yet."



A second major rule change in the proposal calls for the elimination of the throwaway score. The six-up, six-count format would be used only in regional and national competitions, which is both good and bad. It is good because regionals are where teams advance to the NCAAs, so perennial powers like Georgia, Alabama and Utah wouldn't automatically advance. It is bad because the regular season would retain the six-up, five-count format.

"It just doesn't make sense to me that you qualify with different rules than you're going to use once you get into post season," says Marsden, who was in favor of a five-up, five-count format.

"The point here is, the strong teams are still going to have the best chance to win, but this [all-scores count] scenario also gives a team that maybe is not quite as strong, but is very consistent, an opportunity on a given night to beat a team that's more talented than they are," Marsden says. "The purists may struggle with that, but from building drama and interest in our sport, I think it's important that a lot of people on a given night can ... have a chance for

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success."

Though Marsden has created a huge following in Salt Lake City for his Ute gymnasts, he's concerned that the sport needs to make some changes to increase interest at the championship level.

"We've just been stagnant," he says. "In the beginning we were the jewel of women's athletics in the NCAA. We were out-drawing everything. A lot of us felt we've got to do something to create more interest in our sport."

Attendance in Lincoln, Neb., for the 2009 NCAA Championships suffered, mainly because the Cornhuskers failed to qualify a full team to the event. The 2010 NAAs will be hosted by Florida, but the 2011 event will go to Cleveland, a neutral site. The NCAA negotiated with various cities to host a number of championships, and women's gymnastics was included in the package.

"That was a surprise to us," says Marsden, who wouldn't be against trying a permanent neutral site, like men's baseball (Omaha) or women's softball (Oklahoma City). "If it was a place that really embraced our championship and did a great a job and would give us an opportunity to grow our attendance, I'm in favor of [it]."

Only four colleges have won the women's NCAA gymnastics championships since its inception in 1982: Georgia (10); Utah (9); UCLA (5); and Alabama (4). And while those who voted against the proposal may think the chances of a new winner will lessen even more, I think the opposite might happen sooner than you think.

"This certainly has the potential to mix things up," Marsden says.



Confetti falls following the 2009 NCAA Women's "Super Six" in Lincoln, Neb.