

## COMPETITION STRUCTURE 2014

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The rush to implement the new structure in 2014 seems to be driven by a drive to medal in Rio in 2016 and subsequent Olympics and I believe everyone understands the funding issue should we fail to deliver. This haste seems to have precluded the vast majority of our trampoline fraternity from consultation.

I believe that if GB medal in Rio that medallist is already in the system and developed. Any international successes including the 2013 World Games win, recent World Cup successes and the European team title with three ladies in the top 8 etc, are credits to the current system *if* you believe that a competition structure creates champions and potential Olympic medallists.

I believe champions are developed due to all of the following factors - innate talent, commitment, dedication, careful coaching (being in the right place at the right time with the right coach), an excellent sports science support system, a strong support network (parents etc), a squad system and opportunity. I also think that a competition structure is merely a vehicle and opportunity to expose and practice publically the work done in the gym.

I do believe however that a competition structure can reduce opportunity and subsequently reduce medal potential or conversely increase opportunity and increase medal potential.

You may disagree with me and BG do believe competition structures create medallists, but whichever way you fall in this debate the true results will be seen from the proposed 2014 structure in the cycle *post* Rio and not in Rio. Most Olympians have their planned routines tested and secure two years into the cycle, any change in system as monumental as the one proposed will take more than two years to have a true and settled impact.

So if there is general agreement that the outcome at Rio is unlikely to change for our Elite just by segregating them from NDP 7 and 8 and moving their National Finals to September as indicated in the new structure, then it would have made sense to take more time rather than push for the changes immediately.

Every sport and sporting generation brings forth competitors who are great and talented whatever the competition system. The *vast* majority however require a system based carefully on LTAD to prevent burnout and to let them develop at their own speed, using their own learning style and in line with their level of maturity.

BG has an LTAD model based on Dr Istvan Balyi's work in this field. The BG model is very good but general and emphasises that the age bands would vary from discipline to discipline. Due to the general nature of this advice Wayne Smith's nominated advisory group for the 2009 change took this advice and delved deeper to assess the incidence of burn out, loss of confidence and early drop out from our discipline. In doing so we looked at basing our new structure in a model that would all but eradicate the listed problems that were prevalent under the previous two systems.

The current system 2009-2013 was carefully based on researched LTAD advice and evidence which is still current today. Below I have shared the background to this research and why we did what we did in 2009 so you have an idea of what we will be losing. It would however be easy enough to apply these principles to the proposed structure if permitted.

**AGE GROUPS** - The age of a child makes a massive difference to maturity levels. So the current ability based system that allows children to remain in the same ability level whilst changing age groups is in line with LTAD advice. So if a child is not ready to progress to a higher level, rather than being pushed into incrementally increased difficulty due to their age they can develop at their own speed and move vertically through the age groups. This is a horizontal and vertical system.

The proposed 2014 system has ability levels and age groups ie horizontal and vertical from NDP 1 to 6 for all age groups. But apart from very minor developmental changes at Regional level the ability levels show no corresponding relationship in developmental or LTAD terms for any other age group than the 9/10.

For an example – At 17/18 a competitor will compete with a 9 move compulsory at NDP 6 with six somersaults split by non rotational moves into 3 sets of bss/bar links. If they choose the Elite pathway their next requirement is to compete with a compulsory of 10 somersaults including 3 doubles and a twist. The term NDP means

National Development Plan. There is no development from NDP 6 to the Elite 17/18 pathway. This is just one example.

In addition once a trampolinist becomes a National competitor there is only a vertical age group system which has been discredited by the evidence shown below.

Where there is a two year age difference all of the evidence points to a significant reduction in raising standards across the board. To précis, in many age based sports the dominant performers are those born within the first 4 months of the age group band and have 'accumulative advantage'.

Those born later are on a sliding scale and are generally 'accumulatively disadvantaged'. So in the 13/14 age group in 2014, a child born between January and April 2000 will be competing against a child born between October and December 2001 ie will be between 20 and 24 months older. In developmental terms this means that the youngest in the age group is expected to match the maturity of the oldest without ever having the chance to 'catch up'. This observation is aptly described in Malcolm Gladwell's book 'Outliers'.

An age anomaly in the proposed structure can be seen when looking at the compulsory requirement for a 15/16 at Elite and NDP 8 level.

The competitor must execute an 811o. In order to learn an 811o a competitor should have an established 801 o and <, an 800 o and < (rotational power required for an 811o equals an 800 <) plus a 710/5-1.

Scenario:- Competitor 'A' is about to move to the 15/16 age group in 2014. He was born on December 1<sup>st</sup> in 1999 and is just 14 years and 1 month old in January 2014. To be secure and successful in execution he must then have learned all of his pre requisites for the 811o, established them and successfully trained an 811o as move 10 in his compulsory at the age of 12 or 13.

Also although he is nearly two years younger than Competitor 'B' born on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1998 he has to compete with the same tariff requirement of an 11.5. Absolutely no account has been taken of Competitor 'A's' maturation levels physically, psychologically or emotionally and the hardest bit for Competitor 'A' is that because of an accident of birth he will always be either the youngest in the age group (in year one) or the middle aged child in the age group (in year 2), he can never catch up and becomes 'accumulatively disadvantaged'. A few months makes a massive difference to a child's maturation level, we are going to lose these children through an accident of their birth date and a two year age group system. This we addressed in the current structure.

A 12/13 year old has to be pretty special to be able to successfully learn an 811o and all of the pre requisites in order to compete it at the age of just 14 and to hold their own against those two years older with all the advantages two years gives in terms of physical, psychological and emotional maturity. But even more worryingly BG's own advice puts a 13 year old in the 'training to train' LTAD stage with coaches at Level 3. Our coaches will need to be at Level 5 in order to facilitate an 811o for a 12/13 year old.

The current system was based on the past evidence of how we lose too many aspiring champions through a vertical age group system. Please read the synopsis below:

### **OUTLIERS SYNOPSIS**

The book begins with the observation that a disproportionate number of elite Canadian hockey players are born in the first few months of the calendar year. The reason is that since youth hockey leagues determine eligibility by calendar year, children born on January 1<sup>st</sup> play in the same league as those born on December 31<sup>st</sup> in the same year. Because children born earlier in the year are bigger and more mature than their younger competitors, and they are often identified as better athletes, this leads to extra coaching and a higher likelihood of being selected for elite hockey leagues. This phenomenon in which "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" is dubbed "accumulative advantage" by Gladwell, while sociologist Robert K. Merton calls it "the Matthew Effect", named after a biblical verse in the Gospel of Matthew: "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. But from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

**Outliers asserts that success in age group systems depends on the idiosyncrasies of the selection process used to identify talent just as much as it does on the athletes' natural abilities.**

For further compelling reading that highlights the seriously damaging effects of age level distinctions read James Davies – Cracked (some of the evidence in the book is based on a study of one million children in Canada

re maturation differences and the compelling effects on those youngest in an age based system).

**LEARNING STYLES** – I believe four significant skill set acquisitions are required to produce a champion trampolinist.

- 1) The ability to execute multiple rotational moves (twist and somersault) ie tariff
- 2) The ability to jump high and to be technically proficient in order to sustain height ie Time of Flight
- 3) Technical excellence with an ability to transpose to produce a zero deduction ie execution.
- 4) The requisite mental skills.

For a Junior female FIG competitor:-

- 1) Tariff or difficulty represents approximately an average 10% of their preliminary score
  - 2) Time of flight represents approximately an average 35% of their preliminary score
  - 3) Execution represents approximately an average 55% of their preliminary score
- For seniors the tariff constitutes a higher percentage.

The new system which is a National Development Plan has an emphasis mainly on tariff. This may send the message to young and inexperienced coaches who see the NDP as the definitive advice in development that difficulty represents a far higher importance than the 10% it actually represents for juniors. It may create a return to ‘tariff bashing’ and poor technique in the rush to build tariff. In turn there will be more stress created for the trampolinist and possibly more ‘head problems’ as coaches may take short cuts when teaching in order to ‘hit’ tariff minimums and an increase in accidents.

More significantly, children all learn differently and by eliminating some very good trampolinists from the Elite or NDP 7 & 8 system because they are developing Time of Flight and Execution before Tariff (due to their learning predilection) will only cater for up to 33% of our trampolinists. Many would argue that Time of Flight and Execution in turn lead to increased Tariff and the whole push to minimum tariffs is contrary to the most effective way to create top level trampolinists. This ‘one way’ approach may reduce the potential medal pool and may not expand it.

**ROUTINE CONSTRUCTION** – Unless a fully documented book accompanies the new structure immediately with very explicit instruction, litigation could be rife in the event of accidents. It is not ecological to introduce a compulsory routine comprising an 811o for the 15/16 age group when **no previous compulsory** contains even a simple double somersault.

Technically and psychologically the 17/18 NDP 8 compulsory routine is easier than the 15/16 NDP 8 routine. The 15/16 competitors should be able to execute all of the compulsory moves in the 17/18 routine as they are pre requisites for the 811o, except the 800/. I believe that an 800/ is an easier move conceptually, psychologically and technically for a trampolinist to learn than an 811o. So in reality the new structure gives a harder routine both technically and psychologically to a 15/16 than a 17/18.

As this is part of the National Development Plan, if challenged through litigation in the event of an accident it could be discredited as an illogical and irresponsible progression.

There are other technical anomalies but this is the most obvious.

In the current system we were careful to not call it a National Development Plan for the reason that there are many ways to develop a trampolinist and unless the written NDP leaves absolutely nothing open to the possibility of litigation or question it should not be presented as such.

**THE NEW SYSTEM DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN ACCOUNT OF THE PHENOMENA OF UNCONSCIOUS ACCELERATION OF LEARNING AND THE ROLE OF THIS IN LTAD** - The current system was devised in terms of ‘a picture paints a thousand words’. That is, the more exposure trampolinists have to the different levels the more they learn and accelerate learning both unconsciously and consciously. Accelerated learning in trampoline terms means more development, higher form, higher tariff etc. So the current system exposes all competitors to a weekend where they can be in an environment of unconscious learning. Age group times are deliberately changed from gala to gala to allow all competitors the chance to experience the seniors competing. The synchro brings in the National ‘C’ people on the FIG day etc.

The proposed system will significantly reduce numbers, remove gala competitors back into regional competition where they won’t see or experience the best, and will decrease unconscious learning. The splitting up of National Championships reduces this phenomenon further.

Interestingly the current system mirrors international competition much more accurately than the proposed system will. At every major international event our competitors compete against the best, the good, the average and the poor, against the Chinese down to emerging countries new to trampolining. At WAGC the groups can be up to 40 strong. In a senior World Championships the men and women's groups number an average 70 competitors. Not all are good trampolinists. So competing in large groups with varying levels replicates the world of international competition.

Did our 2013 Under 15 champion compete any less well at the 2013 National Championships because he was competing in a broader ability band than the new proposed Elite band? Did our Ladies champion take her performance less seriously in the Ladies because there were a few ladies in the group not using a 12 tariff? Where is the evidence that our competitors will compete better in more highly segregated groups based on tariff alone? In the current structure in effect once competitors make the final (many won't have the essential practice of a final under the new structure) they are then the elite competing against the elite.

The best already compete in the National Championships. The current structure needed amending and streamlining but segregation as suggested will worryingly reduce the 'unconscious learning' phenomenon.

If you refer back to the early days of the current structure you will see how numbers at FIG B have grown in the younger age groups, you will witness the exponential rise over the years in tariff, particularly at National 'C' and the raised standards. Much of this is through assimilation of what is possible, unconscious learning, the motivation to do what others are doing etc as much as other forms of learning.

**IF THE QUALIFICATION SYSTEM IS RETURNING TO A SCORE ONLY AND NOT A PERCENTAGE, WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THIS RETURN?** - We haven't received the scores yet but suspect they will be a definitive upper score for qualification to the National finals. The percentage based system was introduced in 2009 because coaches and judges alike realised how flawed this exact system was that didn't truly reflect the anomalies possible within the judging system.

A past FIG brevet judge some years ago undertook a study of judges' scores. Based on mathematical findings it was determined that the general ranking order was generally correct. It was found that the variance of up to 0.3 on the score total could mean that not always the best won or the exact order may not always be correct but generally it was a fairer system to rank people rather than to do a 'cut off' by a score. This would be reduced now with the objective time of flight adding another score in.

With three scores to count there is the possibility of a variance of up to 0.3 per judge per routine which could make virtually a 2.0 difference over two rounds on comparable routines on different panels without there actually being a judging error. So there was a recognition that the qualification based entirely on definitive judges scores was neither fair to judges who were doing a great job in a system that allowed variance, nor competitors. Based on the study's evidence that the ranking order was generally correct it seemed reasonable to devise a ranking system which allowed the best to qualify with a higher automatic qualification score and others to qualify with a minimum score/percentage qualification.

Since the implementation of this system the relationship between judges and coaches has improved significantly, the competitors are happier having a percentage system and even if there is a large variance in scores the ranking system allows the right ones to qualify providing they have hit a minimum requirement.

This system took a long time to research and devise. To return to just a higher qualification score if this is indeed the plan, will lead to all of the inequities of the past.

**WHY SHOULD BE TRAMPOLINING BE VIEWED DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER GYMNASTICS DISCIPLINES?** - Maybe it shouldn't be but consider the following – the average age of a trampoline gymnast at the Olympics is 26 years old, approximately a decade older than artistic gymnasts. So any trampoline development plan and structure has to reflect the older age rather than mimic an artistic model however effective.

The average drop out age for an artistic gymnast is very young, but because of the type of artistic training from a very young age the artistic gymnast is perfectly trained to move into all of the other disciplines including trampolining and particularly tumbling. They can then have a successful career in an alternative discipline.

Those who specialise at a young age in trampolining as the new system advises, due to the medium of the equipment and the type of specialist training, probably have only one gymnastic discipline into which they could successfully transfer when they retire young, ie DMT.

Hence it is a reasonable prediction that there will be a high dropout rate at about the age of 13 or 14 under the new structure from gymnastics per se by trampolinists. We have looked on our sport holistically in the past. Not only will we lose young people from the sport but these are our potential coaches and judges of the future. The proposed Regional competition is not challenging enough, NDP 3 to NDP 6 can be achieved in months. The outcomes are either too challenging (Elite and NDP 8 tariffs and the 15/16 compulsory) or not challenging enough (NDP 1 to 6). The tariff based system will not suit many competitors who use different learning styles.

Our very youngest in age groups where incremental tariff rises are implemented may never catch up. We are not artistic gymnastics and trampoline gymnasts need a longer developmental pathway in order to keep our competitors engaged.

**FINALLY** - Reducing significantly the base of the pyramid, which on its own the proposed structure will do, will reduce medal opportunities and tariff impositions will prevent many from entering the sport aspiring to elite level after the age of 13 which will be contrary to the design principles of current LTAD evidence.

If the structure moves purely to the proposed one, in time the following outcome may be apparent without any evidence of increased medal winning.

Without the application of current LTAD principles ultimately there could be:-

- 1 a reduction of the medal potential of future trampolinists.
- 2 an increase in early 'drop out' from the sport.
- 3 an increase of stress and loss of confidence as trampolinists have to develop the next level or drop back to the lower level (as a child who is almost two years younger than the oldest in the age group is expected to match performance).
- 4 a prevention of some promising older competitors having a pathway to elite and international competition due to the imposition of tariffs they need longer to develop.
- 5 a promotion of much earlier specialisation in the discipline (contrary to LTAD advice)
- 6 less consistent performance as the 'learning to compete' aspect of LTAD has been removed by allowing entry at any point.
- 7 an increase in 'burn out' for the reasons given above.
- 8 a reduction in coaches and judges developing in our sport.

The current system allows all those younger in the age group to develop at the rate that suits them, and progress as and when they are ready. Anecdotally the incidence of 'burn out' and stress appears to have been massively reduced through the current system whilst tariffs have increased.